MODERN SHORT STORIES

Royal S. Pease

MODERN
AMERICAN AND BRITISH
SHORT STORIES

Edited by

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WITHDRAWN

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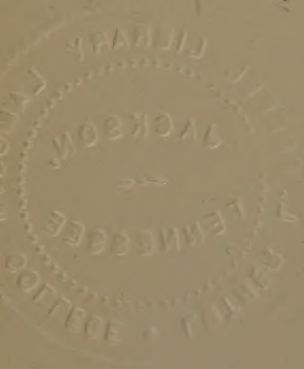

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INTRODUCTION

A famous critic once said that "in literature the elements with which the creative power works are ideas." The methods of handling these ideas are known as techniques. This introduction will deal with the ideas in the stories rather than with the forms in which they are executed, since there is no general theory of construction that fits at once any goodly number of really excellent stories; in fact, there are almost as many techniques as there are stories. Furthermore, technique is always inherent in each individual story itself, which makes appraisal of design chiefly a matter of actual reading. Finally, technical analysis ought not to be the end of short story study; authors do not write to illustrate methods, but rather to present phases of life which strike them as being interesting and at the same time significant.

Although a writer works with ideas, it is not his place to discover them. As Matthew Arnold pointed out, "that is rather the business of the philosopher. The grand work of literary genius is a work of synthesis and exposition, not of analysis and discovery; its gift lies in the faculty of being happily inspired by a certain intellectual and spiritual atmosphere, by a certain order of ideas, when it finds itself in them . . ." We may say, then, that these stories have been produced by a "certain order of ideas," peculiar to and current at our time, working through the medium of our modern writers. To thoroughly understand these stories we must know this "certain order of ideas."

II

A writer attempts to lay hold on actuality and to make it vivid to his reader. If the writer be a romanticist, he finds actuality in the ideal, not in the real. He depends not so much on observing what does exist as he does on imagining what can exist. In other words, he writes of a world which is not "actual" in the real but which is "actual" only in his own mind. But if the writer be a realist, he depends not so much on imagining what can exist as he does on observing what does exist. Briefly, then, the romanticist deals with a subjective world, the world of his own mind—from it he draws the material for his books; but the realist deals with an objective world—the people and things about him he transfers to the pages which he writes.

On the whole contemporary literature is realistic rather than romantic. Our writers have deliberately declined to select their subjects from the beautiful and harmonious (the ideal), and, more especially, have often described ugly things and brought out unsavory details; they have striven to represent facts exactly as they are, without much coloring from the imagination; and they have attempted to deal with individuals, not types, in the sense that they have supplanted the "hero," the "heroine," and the "villain" with good people who are a little bad and bad people who are a little good—that is, they have dropped the romantic character for the realistic one, the actual man.

This impulse toward a realistic presentation of life is not strictly a modern one, although it has seemed more striking in our own day than in any preceding era. Its fount was probably marked by the Renaissance and Reformation, in short by that whole revolt against au-

thority and tradition so characteristic of the sixteenth century. Strictly speaking, contemporary writing is only the logical result of a manner of thought and philosophy three hundred years old.

Despite the age of the realistic tendency, however, it has been only in the last forty years that English and American literatures have definitely abandoned the romantic method for the realistic one. Prior to the nineties certain French writers—Balzac, Flaubert, Daudet, Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, Maupassant, Zola, Huysmans and Bourget—made effective use of realism in their own national literature, and about 1893 their work appeared in translation on British bookstalls. Immediately a storm arose. The London book-seller who was handling the translations was fined and jailed, and England's poet-laureate dutifully came forward with a poem which purported to condemn Zola and the new literary method. Witnessing this stalwart defense of tradition, the average Britisher, who had been reared on the nobleness of Scott and the pathos of Dickens, and who was offended because he found in these French novels not what life ought to be (the ideal), but what life was (the real), settled comfortably back with the pleasant notion that this iniquitous literary fashion from across the Channel had been utterly annihilated and would trouble England no more. But he was mistaken. Even then George Moore and Thomas Hardy had entered the field of English literature with a method and subject matter which greatly resembled those of the outlawed Frenchmen.

At the same time realism was making itself felt in America. In 1892 Stephen Crane appeared in New York with the manuscript of a very short novel which was later to be called *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets.* The story was all that the title implied: the scene was the Bowery; the

language was rough and brutal; the characters were not "nice" people, not even remotely "nice" people. In short, Crane had done what the condemned Frenchmen did, what Moore and Hardy were doing: he had reflected in his work, not the ideal, but the real. His reward was total public neglect and a financial loss on the book's publication.

But realism had come to stay. Hardy and Moore found successors in Ireland and England, and Crane was strikingly and vigorously followed by Norris, Dreiser, Lewis and others in America. With the emergence of these new writers there arose a school of criticism to defend them and lend them support. Today it is certain that the realist commands the literary field: the isolated and occasional romanticist is the exception, not the rule, among contemporary writers.

III

Let us now ask two questions. If we can answer them we shall discover *why* we have a realistic literature rather than a romantic one. First, why is the modern writer's mind what it is, and why does it see life as it does, in terms of the real rather than of the ideal? Second, what influences occasioned the sudden dominance of realism in English and American literatures during the last forty years?

That our writers have chosen to work with the real rather than the ideal, the natural rather than the spiritual, may be put down to one of two reasons. Either they have not been interested in the ideal, or they have not believed in its existence. In order to decide which of these is the true explanation we may turn to modern literature itself. Here the most casual reading makes us immediately aware of an overwhelming skepticism. Our writers are seriously questioning the assumed merits of our religious, social, and

political institutions; furthermore, they are questioning the character of man himself. Disagreeing with what heretofore have been considered the true facts about man and his environment, the modern writer says: "Man and his institutions are not perfect as we have been told they are; they are something vastly different and too often not very commendable." Thus denying current or customary beliefs, revolting from tradition and authority, the modern writer is forced to fall back on himself and his own experience to discover the real truth about life and its relations. How does he gain his experience? Through his senses and their observation of the natural world. "This is our only means of approach to reality," he says.

In spite of his conviction, however, that observation of the real is the highroad to truth, the modern skeptic is still confronted by the question of the possible existence of that other world, the world of the spiritual, the ideal. Does it not exist as truly as the world of the natural, or the real, which we are able to apprehend with our senses? Is there not a world of ideas, of thought, which exists, or seems to exist, contemporaneously with the world of natural law, although our senses may be powerless to discover it? If our modern skeptics rely only on the evidence of their senses, are they not neglecting and ignoring, therefore, a large and important area of human life?

The evident fact that the modern skeptic is not very much concerned about this problem is due chiefly to two influences: first, the rise of materialism, fostered by the discoveries and hypotheses of modern scientific research, which has placed emphasis on matter and motion, not spirit; and second, the philosophy of Hume, who became the chief exponent of the materialistic view of human life. Hume's answer to the question of the possible existence of an ideal world was that all the concepts of a philosophy

which seeks to describe the ideal are merely borrowed from the world of matter and are, therefore, dependent, as are other concepts, upon the evidence of the senses. Under the influence of this modern scientific thought and philosophy, then, our skeptic concludes that the spiritual world does not exist, or if it does, we have no direct evidence of it, and are therefore ignorant of its existence and nature. Consequently he turns to his own experience, based on the evidence of his senses, as the only guide to reality—and it is reality, and only reality, which interests him.

Such, then, has been the intellectual and spiritual atmosphere, the "certain order of ideas," in which our writers have found themselves, and it has been this very "order of ideas" that has made the modern writer's mind what it is and occasioned the sudden dominance of realism in our literature during the last forty years.

IV

What has been said about modern literature in general is for the most part applicable to the stories included in this book. There are left, however, at least two specific points which we may profitably discuss.

The first of these is the difference between English and American short stories. Fundamentally this is merely the difference between the English and American peoples, between a nation on the one hand that has for long been "settled" and has developed the finest of its literature in its Chaucer, its Shakespeare, its Milton, and its Wordsworth, and a nation on the other that has been too busy pioneering, trading, building, manufacturing to take much time off for the arts. America's creative genius is indubitably industrial and commercial: she has few first-rate literary men who can stand with the many England has produced.

Because of these natural differences we may expect from the English writer a finished and cultivated style, a restrained manner and a near-perfect and excellent prose; but from the American we may look for a boldness of outline, a vigorous conception, accurate observance of fact and a crude drive and power that are in essence the very temperament of America.

Again one may say that the short story has never been for the English writer a "form" in which characters and events must be cast: he has been little troubled by "plot," "rising action," "surprise endings" and the other knick-knacks of the trade. He has simply told a story and it took whatever artistic and convenient form it liked as he went along. It has been said that the English short story is only another kind of English novel—a shorter one.

The American, however, is credited with the "development" of the short story. Several critics have said that he invented it; whether he did or not, all of them agree that he standardized it. He set limits to it as he did to his cities and fields, he laid out its scheme as he laid out his highways, he designed its mechanics as he designed his automobiles and electric washers and office buildings; when he got through, about O. Henry's time, he had a perfect product of a kind—he had a standardized magazine story that was sure to sell itself to the editors. It is still selling. Open any magazine of wide circulation and you will find three to a dozen such stories eager to hold you in suspense but not to bother you with realistic observation or critical thought. They tell the public what it wants to hear: that poor men get rich; that the office boy marries the boss's daughter; that effort is always amply rewarded; that the crook is always caught; that "all's right with the world." These stories have nothing to do with the best ideas current at the time, but they are

printed because the magazine-reading public demands them.

Happily the American short story at its best has never made obeisance to such artificial standards. Writers like the Americans included in this book have gone their own way, a way curiously parallel to that of their English cousins. When they wrote a story they let it take whatever artistic and convenient form it liked as they went along. What they were after was not the embodiment of "plot," "rising action," and the "surprise ending"; they were after a perfect presentation of man in twentieth-century society—the real man in real society. The excellence of their stories can often be gauged by the degree of fidelity with which they have made us see the world in which we live.

V

Finally, something can be said about the theme of the contemporary short story. Man in relation to his environment is the constant, as it is in virtually all of modern literature: man trying to escape his social milieu, as Paul does in Willa Cather's "Paul's Case"; man faintly troubled and puzzled but never seriously disturbed by his surroundings, as are the members of the family in Zona Gale's "A Far Cry"; man perfectly contented, ignorant, unquestioning, as is Mr. Schmaltz in Sinclair Lewis' "Travel Is So Broadening." Whatever his reaction to his own little world, man remains the center of the story. He is probed, questioned, analyzed, exposed, displayed. Modern psychology leaps upon him with the doctrine that "sensations" and "associations" are indicative of judgment and conscience, and we are immediately made acquainted with his stream of consciousness, not part of it, but the whole of it. The inner life and morality of human-

ity, so long denied access to the printed page, perhaps because we lacked the knowledge, perhaps because we lacked the valor, are now being set down as faithfully as our modern writers know how—and all toward one end, the answering of a question that every great work of art has attempted to answer: What *is* Man?

MODERN
AMERICAN AND BRITISH
SHORT STORIES

FAREWELL! FAREWELL! FAREWELL![1]

by Conrad Aiken

Conrad Aiken was born in Savannah, Georgia, in 1889. Educated at Harvard, he is one of the most notable of the younger American writers. His poetry is remarkable for its intellectual conception and brilliancy of finish, his prose for its excellent rendering of delicate and momentary emotional states in people's lives. His books include *Priapus and the Pool, The Pilgrimage of Festus, Punch: the Immortal Liar,* and *The Jig of Forslin,* poetry; *Blue Voyage,* a novel; *Scepticisms,* critical essays; and two volumes of short stories, *Bring! Bring!* and *Costumes by Eros.*

Margaret O'Brien dreamed that she woke up late—the alarm-clock on the table by her bed said eight o'clock—she couldn't account for it, and jumped out of bed in a panic. The Converses expected breakfast at eight-thirty. She flew down to the kitchen, without stopping to put up her hair or wash her face, and rushed to the stove. It was out. The grate was full of half-burned coal and ashes, cold, and she dumped out the whole thing: a cloud of dust filled the air, and she began to cough. Then she found that the kindling-box was empty, and that she would have to go down to the cellar and get some. She stuffed newspapers into the grate, flung her hair over her left shoulder, and went to the door which led down to the cellar. It was locked or stuck. She pulled at the knob, wrestled with it, shook it violently; and just at that moment she heard Mrs. Converse's voice in the distance,

[1] From *Costumes by Eros* by Conrad Aiken. Copyright, 1927, 1928, by Charles Scribner's Sons. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

calling her: "*Margaret!—Margaret!—Margaret!*" The bell began ringing furiously and prolongedly in the indicator over the sink, and she turned around and saw all the little arrows jumping at once. Some one—perhaps Mr. Converse—was running down the front stairs, running and singing. The voice trailed off forlornly, with the sinister effect of a train-whistle. A door slammed—Mr. Converse had gone off without waiting for his breakfast—and she woke up.

Sweet hour, what a dream! She rubbed her hand across her forehead, looked up, and saw something unfamiliar over her head: it was the upper bunk of the stateroom, with long leaded slats of wood to support the mattress. Then there was a rack with a life-belt in it. Of course: she was on a steamship, going to Ireland. How funny! She relaxed, smiled, turned her head on the hard little pillow, and looked across to the other bunk; and there was Katy looking back at her and grinning. The ship gave a long, slow lurch, and the hooked door rattled twice on its brass hook. She put her hand quickly to her mouth.

"Gosh, what a dream I had!" she said. "I'm going to get out of this, or I'll be sick."

"Me, too," said Katy. "You could cut the air with a knife."

"What time is it, I wonder?"

Katy slid a bare leg out from under the bedclothes.

"I don't know," she said. "I heard a gong, but I don't know if it was the first or the second."

II

It was a lovely day, and the ocean was beautiful. It was much smoother than they had expected it to be, too—a lazy blue swell with fish-scale sparkles on it. A sailing-ship

went by on the south, with very white sails, and tiny row-boats hung up on the decks, and one hanging over the stern. They could see a little man running along the deck and then hauling up a bunch of flags, some kind of signal. It was the kind of day when it is warm, almost hot, in the sun, but cold in the shade. They walked round and round the decks, after eating some oranges, and wished there was something to do. At eleven o'clock the band began playing in the lounge, and they went in for a cup of beef-tea. The room was crowded, and children were falling over people's legs. Some women were playing cards at a table. The deck-steward went round with a tray of beef-tea cups and crackers.

While they were drinking their beef-tea they saw him again—the gentleman who had the room next to theirs: he just looked into the lounge for a minute, with a book under his arm, and then went out again. He was the nicest man on the ship: so refined-looking, so much of a gentleman, with a queer, graceful, easy way of walking and such nice blue eyes. He reminded Margaret a little of Mr. Converse, but he was younger; he couldn't have been more than thirty. She thought it would be nice to talk to him, but she supposed he wouldn't come near her. He had been keeping aloof from every one, all the way over, reading most of the time, or walking alone on the deck with that book under his arm, and never wearing a hat.

"I'd like to talk to that man," she said, putting down the cup under her chair.

"Well, why don't you?" said Katy. "I guess he wouldn't bite you."

"He looks like Mr. Converse; I guess he's shy."

"I don't see what's the matter with Pat, if you want to talk to somebody."

"Oh, Pat's all right. . . ."

Pat, however, was in the steerage, and when Margaret wanted to talk to him they had to go down the companion-way to the forward deck. It was all right, but it did seem a pity, when you were in the second cabin, to be spending so much time down in the steerage. And Katy had taken up with old man Diehl, the inventor, who was in the second cabin. He was after her all the time to play cards or walk on the deck or sit and talk in the smoking-room. It was all right for Katy, but not much fun for Margaret. She couldn't always be tagging along with them, and she didn't like to feel that Mr. Diehl was paying for her glass of Guinness every time they had a drink.

A crowd of people rushed out to the decks, and others went to the windows, pointing; so they went out too, to see what the excitement was about. It was only another steamer coming from the opposite direction, with black smoke pouring out of its smoke-stacks. They walked along to the place where they played shovelboard, but some kids had it; so then they didn't know what to do. They looked down at the steerage-deck, and there were Pat and the girls having a dance. Pat was playing his concertina. His black curly hair was blowing in the wind, and he looked up and saw them. He jerked his head backward as a signal to them to come down, so they did. They danced for a while, and one of the girls passed round a box of candy.

"I guess you think you're too good for us," said Pat, grinning.

"No, we don't," Margaret said. "But they don't like to have us going up and down these stairs. It's against the rules of the ship."

"Ah, tell it to the marines," said Pat.

He shut up his eyes and began playing "The Wearing of the Green," beating time with his foot on the deck.

"I hear Katy has a swell sweetheart," one of the girls said.

They talked about old man Diehl, and how he always carried around the blueprints of his inventions with him, and showed them all the time to everybody in the smoking-room. Katy said she liked his voice: such a deep rumble, it carried all over the dining-room—you could hear it above everything else, even the music. And it wasn't that he was talking loudly, either. He seemed to have lots of money. His daughter was with him, very pretty, but with a bad heart. She was kind of stuck-up, and wouldn't have anything to do with Katy, and was always dragging the old man out of the smoking-room on one excuse or another. But she looked very pretty at the dance in that orchid dress.

"I guess he made a lot of money out of those inventions," said Katy.

"What did he invent?" one of the girls asked.

"One of those amusement things they have at Coney Island," said Katy.

Just then the whistle blew for noon, deafening everybody, and the steerage-passengers had their dinner at noon, so they began going away. Pat strapped up his concertina and ran his hand through his hair.

"So long," he said. "Give us a look again, when you haven't got any swell company."

He dived down the dark little companionway, and they were left alone.

As they went up the stairs Margaret said that Pat gave her a headache. He made her tired. He made her sick.

III

At lunch there was something of a treat. A special table had been put on the little platform where the band usually

played—the piano had been pushed back—and a swell party was being given there. It was, in fact, the wedding-breakfast, after a mock wedding which had taken place in the dining-saloon just before lunch. They had come in just as it was over and old Mr. Diehl was in the act of kissing the bride, who was Mr. Carter dressed up in a girl's dress. The bridegroom was Miss Diehl dressed in a man's tuxedo. They all sat, eight people, at the round table on the platform, and they had several bottles of wine. Miss Diehl was wearing a white yachting-cap to keep up her hair, which was pulled up to look like a man's.

"Your friend is there," said Katy, giving Margaret a nudge with her elbow.

And, sure enough, he was. He was sitting at the opposite side, next to Mr. Carter, and he looked as if he weren't enjoying himself at all. He kept sipping his wine and smiling in an uneasy sort of way, as if he were very much embarrassed. Most of the time he was looking down at the dishes before him. The rest of the party were making a lot of noise, talking and laughing and making jokes and slapping each other on the back. Then Mr. Diehl made a speech, toward the end, and the bridegroom got up and proposed a toast. Several toasts were drunk and speeches made, and they tried to get the nice man to get up and speak, but he blushed and resisted and sat still, though Mr. Carter tried to push him out of his chair.

"He's awful good-looking," said Margaret.

"Suit yourself," said Katy. "To my idea, he's too quiet-seeming."

"I wish he'd look at me once."

"Well, if you keep on staring at him like you are, he will, and then he'll be scared to death."

All the same, she felt as if she couldn't keep her eyes

off him, she didn't know why; there was something very appealing about his face. His blue eyes were very kind and wise-looking, and he had a way of smiling to himself all the time as if he were having all sorts of humorous thoughts. She felt that he was very superior to all those other people, but he was too nice to show it. In fact, he was superior to every one else on the ship. There was something important about him.

And then, all of a sudden—she didn't know just how it happened—he was looking at her. There were two tables in between, and lots of other people he might have looked at, and a branch of a palm-tree that almost got in the way, but in spite of all these obstacles there could be no doubt about it: he was looking straight at her. A sort of shock went through her, and she felt herself blushing. But she kept her nerve, and looked back at him without in the least changing her expression, which she knew had been one of frank admiration. In fact, she felt her eyes widening a little, and a special kind of brightness going into them. And the strangest thing of all was the way he met this: he looked quickly away, but only for a moment; and then he looked right back again, while with one hand he fiddled with his glass of water. He looked at her almost as if he had suddenly recognized her, though of course they had never met before. His eyes brightened, in fact, in exactly the same way that hers had done; they brightened and widened, and he seemed to be unable to look away again. So they looked at each other for about two or three minutes like this, as if they were the only two people in the whole room. It was almost as if they were signaling to each other. Then Mr. Carter apparently said something to him, and he turned his head away.

"Well, he looked at me," she said to Katy, "and something happened."

"What do you mean, something happened?"

"I don't know, but it gave me a funny feeling. I think he likes me the same way I like him."

"Don't be too sure," said Katy. "Anyway, he isn't looking at you now."

"No, I know he isn't; but he was, just the same. It was a long look, and I felt all over as if I was melting."

"I guess what you need is some air," said Katy, "or else both of you'll have to be locked up."

IV

They roamed the decks again after lunch, and sat for a while in the sun-parlor at the back, in wicker chairs, watching the stern of the ship swoop up and down in quarter-circles against the sea, which seemed to be coming right up over the ship but never did; and for a while the old deckhand, a sailor with a nice white beard, stood with his pail in his hand and talked to them about the "old country." He also told them about a hawk that had been blown on to the ship. It was exhausted, he said. It had probably been chasing some other bird and followed it out to sea, and then didn't know how to get back. It stayed on one of the masts for a while, and they put out food for it, and then the next day they found it on the bow, huddled up against an iron thwart. It fought when they came near it, and it wouldn't eat, so they decided they'd better kill it. Finally, one of the sailors threw his hat over it and jumped on it, and killed it.

"Oh, what a shame!" said Margaret. "I think that's a shame."

The old sailor grinned, half-embarrassed.

"We get hardened to it," he said. "There's always birds like that coming aboard, you know, and they never live. Those little yellowbirds, for instance. You can feed them,

but they die just the same, and you might as well heave 'em overboard and be done with it. They get so tame, or scared maybe, that they'll come hoppin' right in here amongst these chairs."

After a while he went away, carrying his sponge in one hand and his pail in the other, walking very slowly, as if there was lots of time. Katy opened her magazine and began reading. Every now and then she turned a page, but she hadn't turned many when Margaret noticed that she was fast asleep. The twins went by, with their short skirts blowing way up round their skinny little legs, and then came Mr. Carter and Miss Diehl, in their proper clothes again. They brought the peg and began playing quoits. They were having a good time—just as they were going to throw the quoit the ship would give a slant and the quoit would go wild. They would laugh and stagger about. The noise finally waked up Katy. She yawned and stretched, and wanted as usual to know what time it was. The sky was clouding up and the wind seemed colder, so they decided to go and sit in the lounge. Margaret wanted to be doing something, but she didn't know what there was they could do.

"What are you so restless for?" said Katy.

"I'm not restless; only I get so sick of just sitting round and watching the water go by."

"Well, it *is* kind of monotonous, at that," said Katy.

They took a look down at the steerage-deck, but there was nobody there, probably because it was getting chilly. In the steerage you got all the wind.

What she really wanted was to see the nice man again, but she couldn't exactly go looking for him. She hoped he would be in the lounge, and when she saw that he wasn't she thought of suggesting to Katy that they go to the smoking-room, but she didn't quite have the nerve to do

it. Instead they settled down in a corner and listened to the music and had their tea and watched the people and yawned. Margaret felt unhappy. It wasn't only because she wanted to see him; it was just as much because she was bored with being on a ship. Every day was like Sunday. After a while you got tired of walking round the decks and sitting here and sitting there and drinking tea or beef-tea and going to the dining-saloon for another meal that was just like the last. The stewards were all the time trying to flirt with them, too.

All the same, she didn't see how it could just end there, after a look like that—it didn't seem natural at all. But would he do anything about it? Most probably he was too shy. He might even be so shy that he would try to keep out of her way. Or he might think that she was trying to kidnap him or something. She thought of that look again, and felt herself blushing just the way she did at the time. If any look had a meaning, that look did. There was no getting away from that.

"I'll be back in a minute," she said, suddenly jumping up.

She walked quickly out of the lounge without knowing at all where she was going—she just felt that she had to be doing something, going somewhere, anything but just sitting still. She felt excited, too, as she pushed open the door that led out to the deck—it had been shut for the night—and launched herself out into the wind. It was just getting dark. The water was black, with patches of moving white, and seemed to be sliding past the ship much faster than it did in the daytime. She walked briskly round the deck, keeping an eye out for other pedestrians, but there was nobody about. She tried the other two decks, but they too were deserted. Then she stood hesitating. After all, she didn't have the least idea of what to say to

him if she met him—or whether she would find any excuse for it, or way of doing it. In fact, she wasn't sure that that was what she wanted. She just wanted to see him. Perhaps he was in the smoking-room. She turned and went down a companionway to the lower deck again, and then round the sun-parlor to the smoking-room. She went in and stood near the door, as if she just wanted to look round for some one, and surveyed the whole room. Old man Diehl was standing by the bar with Mr. Carter and two other men; he seemed to be a little drunk. They were telling smutty stories. The bar-steward saw her and warned them, and they lowered their voices. Two other men were sitting in armchairs facing the artificial fire; neither of them was the man she was looking for. And there was no one else in the room. She returned to the sun-parlor, which looked very forlorn with its deserted wicker chairs under electric lights, facing the darkness and emptiness of the sea, and sat down. Suddenly she felt defeated and miserable. She didn't want to see Katy or anybody—she didn't want to go down to dinner. She would excuse herself with a headache and go to bed. . . .

V

At lunch the next day she said she was going to speak to him if she died for it. She would ask him to join them in a game of whist. They could get old man Diehl to make the fourth, in case he accepted. Katy was sceptical but resigned.

"Anybody'd think you were in love with him," she said.

Margaret laughed and blushed.

"Oh, no," she said. "But I'd like to talk to him just the same. After lunch I'm going to find him if I have to comb the whole ship. He must be somewhere."

They had seen him only once in the morning—as usual he was walking the deck for his half-hour's constitutional. He passed them several times, and looked at them with interest but without speaking. Margaret said she thought he wanted to speak but was too bashful. He had that everlasting blue book under his arm, and his fair hair was all on end with the wind. Then he had disappeared again.

After lunch, accordingly, they went straight to the lounge and got a table, and Katy spoke to Mr. Diehl. Mr. Diehl said he would be in the smoking-room and they could find him there any time in case they wanted a game. Katy got the cards and sat down at the table, and Margaret started off to make her search; and just at that very minute he came in and sat down at the other side of the room and opened his book. She didn't know whether he had seen them or not.

She walked right up to him, smiling, and stood in front of him and looked down at him.

"Would you care to join us in a game of whist?" she said.

He closed his book and looked up.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said, smiling.

She gave a laugh.

"Yes, it's me, large as life and twice as natural!"

He stood up, tucking the book under his arm.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "I never played whist in my life. Is it anything like bridge?"

"I don't know, but I guess if you can play bridge you can play whist."

They stood very close to each other, swaying with the ship, and again they found themselves looking into each other's eyes as they had done the day before at lunch. Margaret almost regretted that they had planned the

whist-game, for it was now obvious that otherwise she could have him all to herself.

"All right," he said, again smiling; "if you can stand it I can."

She led him over to the table and introduced him to Katy. He said his name was Camp. Katy got up and went in pursuit of Mr. Diehl, and they sat down.

"You'd better be my partner," she said, "and then I can show you as we go along."

She took the chair opposite his and began shuffling the cards, at the same time looking at him. A feeling of extraordinary happiness came over her—she had never in her life felt so happy, or so much as if her whole happiness was in her eyes. And the queer thing was that she somehow knew that he was in the same state of mind.

"What do you do with yourself all the time?" she asked. "You hardly ever seem to be anywhere round."

"Most of the time I've been in the smoking-room playing chess," he said. "But I've also been working a good deal in my stateroom. I've got some work that has to be finished before we get to Liverpool. And there's only two more days."

Margaret felt a sharp pain in her breast.

"I get off at Queenstown," she said. "Tomorrow night."

"*Do* you?"

He accented the first word, and looked at her with a curious helplessness. They both dropped their eyes and became silent.

At that moment Katy brought Mr. Diehl and introduced him, and the game began. Margaret and Katy explained how it went to Mr. Camp, with a good deal of laughter. Mr. Diehl gave Mr. Camp a cigar.

"What's your line of business, Mr. Camp?" he said.

Mr. Camp said that he was an architect. He was going over to superintend the construction of a new office-building that an American firm was putting up in London. Margaret felt a thrill. She slid her right foot forward under the table, so that the toe of her slipper touched something. Then Mr. Camp, after a moment, caught her foot between his two feet and squeezed it firmly, and they looked at each other and smiled.

VI

At four o'clock the deck-steward brought them tea, and Mr. Diehl began telling them in his deep voice, with a slight German accent, how he had come to America at the age of sixteen and worked in railroad repair-shops. He said he was sixty-eight years old and strong as an ox, and he looked it. He told Mr. Camp about his Whirligig Car, at Coney Island, and how he got the idea for it in his work on trucks in the railroad yards. Now it had made him a fortune, and he was going over to Blackpool and Southport to put them in there.

Margaret couldn't listen. She was impatient. She wanted to go off alone with Mr. Camp. She pressed his foot hard, under the table, and smiled at him. But he didn't take the hint, or couldn't think what to do. It was Katy who saved the day. She got up and suggested that they all take a stroll—it was a lovely warm day and a shame to be indoors. Besides, the lounge was getting stuffy.

"Come on, then, Katy!" said Mr. Diehl.

He jumped up and gave her his arm with mock gallantry—the sort of thing he was always doing—and they started off.

"Shall we walk too—or shall we stay here?" said Mr. Camp.

"Whatever you like," said Margaret.

"I feel terribly separated from you, without your foot," he said, laughing. "But I suppose we ought to get a breath of air."

They climbed up to the top deck and began walking to and fro. He didn't offer to take her arm, but walked rather distantly beside her. At first they couldn't think of much to say—they talked about the whist-game and Mr. Diehl, but not as if they were really interested in these things. Margaret felt as if she wouldn't be able to think straight till she took his arm, so after a few turns on the deck she did so.

"That's better," she said simply.

"Much!"

"Tell me," she said, "if I hadn't spoken to you, would you ever have spoken to me?"

"That's what I came into the lounge for," he answered. "Ever since lunch yesterday I've been wondering what on earth to do about it. I'm kind of shy, and these things don't come natural to me. But I thought, if I went into the lounge, some kind of opportunity might occur. That's what I was there for. But I was terribly relieved when *you* started it off."

"You must think I'm very bold."

"Good Lord, no! You had a little more courage than I did, that's all."

They talked then about Ireland, and she told him that she was going back to visit her mother for the summer. She was a cook, she said, and her employer, Mr. Converse, who was very nice, had given her three months off and paid her passage to Queenstown. She had been in Brooklyn for ten years. She was twenty-five. He asked her if she was married, and she said no.

"I am," he said.

She felt again that pain in her breast.

"I thought you were," she said, looking intently at him.

He wanted to know why she thought so, and they stood and leaned against the railing, with their shoulders touching and their faces very close. His eyes, she noticed, were even bluer than the sea. She couldn't tell him why she thought so, exactly—it was just something about him.

"A woman can almost always tell when a man's married," she said. "But I'm glad you told me, all the same."

"I believe in being honest, especially at a time like this."

"How do you mean, at a time like this?"

He gave her a queer look—the corners of his mouth were twisting a little, as if he were under a strain, but there was a twinkle in his eyes.

"You know what I mean," he said.

"No, honest, I don't!"

"Well, you certainly ought to," he said. He turned around and put his arms on the railing and stared down at the water. "I mean the way we feel about each other."

She held her breath. He had said it so nicely and so quietly, and without even trying to hold her hand.

"How do you know we do!" she said, smiling.

He smiled back at her.

"All right—let's see you look me in the eye and tell me that we don't!"

She looked away from him, sobering.

"We oughtn't to be talking like this," she answered. "What about your wife? You know it isn't right."

"Of course it isn't . . . Or is it? . . . I don't know."

"What does your religion tell you?" she said.

"I haven't got any."

"Well, I have. I'm a Catholic."

"Do you go to confession?"

"Sure, I do."

They were silent. She was half-sorry she had rebuked him, and half-glad. But he had to know how she felt, even if it hurt her to tell him. She didn't want him to get any false ideas. After a minute, as he didn't say anything, but just went on staring at the water, she turned and looked at him. He was resting his chin on his hands.

"Would you like to walk some more?" she asked, almost timidly.

They walked round and round the deck, while slowly the sunset behind them faded and the sky darkened. He said that he always thought the sea sounded louder at night, and she stopped to listen to it, to see if it was true. She said she couldn't see any difference, or any reason why there should be any. They talked about Katy and Mr. Diehl. Miss Diehl, she said, was likely to die most any time—she had a very bad heart. But she insisted on doing everything just as if there wasn't anything the matter with her. Everybody at the dance had been scared that she would just drop down on the floor all of a sudden. Her face had got very white.

"Let's go down and find Katy," she suggested.

They went down the ladder to the lower deck and found them sitting in the sun-parlor, holding hands.

"Is *that* what you're doing!" said Margaret.

Mr. Diehl gave his deep rumble of a laugh.

"I've got a pretty nice little girl," he said, patting Katy's shoulder.

Margaret and Mr. Camp sat down at the other side of the veranda. He pulled his chair up close to hers and she dropped her hand on her knee, where he couldn't help seeing it. He put his own on top of it after a moment, and they just sat still without saying anything for a long while. He stroked her thumb with one of his fingers, to

and fro, and the smooth hollow between the thumb and forefinger, and she felt as if she were being hypnotized. Once in a while he would slip his finger up her sleeve and touch the inner side of her wrist. And once in a while, as if accidentally, he would stroke her knee. She knew he wouldn't try to kiss her.

"My stateroom is next door to yours," he said, after a time. "If you should want me for anything in the night, don't hesitate to come in."

There was a pause.

"I don't think there's anything I'd want," she answered. "Unless one of us was to be sick, or something like that."

"Well, if there's anything at all," he said.

She tried to withdraw her hand, but he held on to it. She gave up struggling and allowed it to remain in his. She felt unhappy again.

"I always try to think the best of people," she said. "I'm sure you didn't mean anything wrong by that."

He didn't reply, but instead, after a pause, put his other hand on her forearm and gave it a squeeze.

"You're awfully nice, Margaret," he said. "If I were free, I'd like to marry you."

She shut her eyes, and didn't know whether to believe him or not.

VII

After dinner she had a good cry in her bunk, while Katy sat and talked to her, and from time to time wet the wash-cloth to put on her eyes. The ship was making a terrible noise, blowing off steam, which was a good thing, as it prevented the neighbors from hearing her. Two of the bedroom stewards were hanging round in the corridor outside. Now and then she could hear them laughing. Katy sat on the camp-chair and argued with her.

"You just put him out of your mind," she said.

"But I can't. You think it's easy, Katy, but it isn't."

"I told you how it would be from the beginning, Peg, and you wouldn't listen to me. He doesn't care anything for you—don't kid yourself. He isn't our kind at all. You know how it is with that kind of man. He may soft-soap you, but really he looks down on us, and if he met us anywhere at home he wouldn't even speak to us."

Margaret moved her head from side to side on the pillow—back and forth, back and forth.

"No," she said, "he isn't like that. He's in love with me. He doesn't despise me because I'm a cook."

"Don't kid yourself. He might think so right now, when there's nobody else for him to fool with, but that's all there is to it. What's the use getting all upset about it, anyway, with him a married man!"

Margaret blew her nose and sat up.

"It's awful hot in here," she said.

"I tell you what, you need a little excitement to take your mind off this business. Let's get a glass of stout and then go down and have a bit of a dance with Pat and the girls."

Margaret was helpless, apathetic. She didn't care one way or the other, and she was too tired to resist. She bathed her eyes in the wash-basin, rubbed her cheeks with the towel, and tidied up her hair. Maybe Katy was right —maybe he really didn't care for her at all. He shouldn't have said that about her coming to his stateroom; though, of course, men's views were so different about those things.

She felt better after the glass of stout, and they went down the dark companionway to the steerage-deck—the whole crowd was out there in the moonlight, Pat with his concertina, another boy with his mouth-organ. Two of the men were whirling a skipping-rope, and the girls were

taking turns in seeing how fast they could skip and how long they could keep it up. A lot of people were sitting along the canvas-covered hatch. Katy had a try at it, and the very first thing the rope caught her skirt and lifted it way up so that her knickers showed, and everybody laughed. Katy didn't mind at all. She laughed as much as anybody did. She was a good sport. There was an English girl, about eighteen, who was the best at it—she would take a running start into the rope and put her hands on her hips and jump as if she was possessed. They couldn't down her at all, and everybody clapped her when finally one of the men dropped his end of the rope.

Pat tuned up on his concertina and they began to dance. A tall young fellow named Jim, who was a carpenter, asked Margaret to dance with him, and before she had time to make up her mind about it he had grabbed her and she was dancing with him and having a good time. They had a fox-trot first, and after that there was a jig, and in the middle of this, just when she had bumped into Katy and they were both laughing, she happened to look up at the second-cabin deck, and there was Mr. Camp, looking down. She waved her hand at him.

"Come on down!" she shouted to him.

He shook his head and smiled; Mr. Carter was standing with him. Jim yanked her hand and whirled her round, and when she looked up again he was gone.

VIII

They spent the morning in packing, and getting their landing-cards, and writing letters. He wasn't at breakfast when they were, and she took Katy's advice and kept out of his way. At lunch she avoided looking in his direction—she knew he was there, and Katy said he kept looking toward her, but she wouldn't look back. She guessed

Katy was right. If he had really cared, he would have come down and danced with them. He was probably a snob, just as Katy said he was. After lunch she went back to the stateroom, and didn't go out till she heard they were sailing along close to the coast of Ireland; so she went up on deck. There was a crowd all along the railing, and she and Katy wedged themselves in and stared at the cliffs and green slopes and watched the little steam-trawlers wallowing up and down in what looked like a smooth sea. A tremendous lot of sea-gulls were flying over the ship, swooping down to the water for the swill that was flung overboard, and all of them mewing like cats. The idea of landing at Queenstown was beginning to be exciting. Her mother and uncle would probably come in from Tralee to meet her, and she supposed they would all spend the night in some hotel in Queenstown.

When they went in for their last tea she rather hoped that Mr. Camp would turn up, but he didn't. By this time, most likely, he saw that she was avoiding him, and was keeping himself out of her track. Maybe his feelings were hurt. She was restless, unhappy, excited, and, try as she would, she couldn't stop thinking about him. She gulped down her two cups of tea as if she were in a hurry; but then she couldn't find anything to be in a hurry for. Her trunk was packed, her bag was all strapped and labeled, there was nothing to do. The orchestra came in and began playing. The sound of the music made her feel like crying. Katy said she was going to see if there was a night train out of Queenstown for the north. She got down a time-table from the shelves and looked at it, but couldn't make head or tail of it. Then two of the ladies at their table came with menus on which they were getting all their acquaintances to sign their names. She and Katy signed their names and said

good-by, in case they shouldn't meet again, for it wasn't certain whether they would have supper on board or not. The rumor was that they would get into Queenstown harbor about six o'clock, in which case the Queenstown passengers would have to wait and have their supper in Queenstown.

It was after dark when finally the ship swung into the harbor. They felt the engine stopping, and ran out on deck. They could see the lights all round them, and a long row of especially bright ones; there was the hotel, and another ship waiting a little way off—waiting, as they were, for the tenders to come out. Everything seemed very still, now that the engines were stopped; it was almost as if something was wrong with the ship,—unnatural. Everybody seemed to talk in lower voices. The harbor water was quieter than the ocean: it just lapped a little against the side of the ship, and there was a long narrow rowboat which had come out and was lying against the bow with two men in it, one of them giving an occasional flourish with a long oar. A light was played on them from the ship, so that they stood out very clear against the blackness of the water. Then at last they saw the tenders coming out, and they decided they had better go down and see about their things.

It was just after they had tipped the steward, and he had gone off with the trunks, and just when they heard the tender coming alongside, that Mr. Camp suddenly came to their stateroom door.

"I've just dropped in to say good-by," he said, putting his hand against one side of the doorway.

Katy saw how it was, and said she had to go out for a minute, leaving them alone. Mr. Camp stepped in then, and shut the door behind him. He put out his hand and

she took it, and they shook hands for a minute, feeling embarrassed.

"Good-by, Margaret," he said.

"Good-by, Mr. Camp."

"I've been hunting for you all day," he said. "Why did you hide yourself from me?"

"I thought it was better," she said.

She felt the tears coming into her eyes and was ashamed. He suddenly put his arms around her and kissed her. She tried to turn her face away from him, and he just kissed her cheek two or three times, lightly. His arms were holding her very hard. Then he kissed her once on the mouth.

"You mustn't," she said. "You're a married man."

They looked at each other for what seemed like a long while, and then they heard some one coming to the door and he let her go. Katy and the steward were there. It was time to go. Mr. Diehl came running up too, and she hurriedly put on her hat and coat. Mr. Diehl took Katy's bag from the steward, and Mr. Camp picked up hers from the camp-chair.

They followed the other passengers and stewards with bags along the corridor, went through the first-cabin dining-saloon, and then came out on to a deck where an iron door had been swung open and the gangway made fast. There was a great crowd there, and two officers standing at the top of the gangway taking the landing-cards. Mr. Diehl gave Katy her hand-bag and tried to kiss her, right there before everybody, and she gave a screech and tried to run, but he caught her and kissed her. Then she started down the steep gangway under the bright lights. Mr. Camp handed Margaret her bag and shook hands with her again.

"Here's my address," he said. "Write me a letter some time, if you feel like it."

He gave her a slip of paper, and she tucked it under her glove.

"Good-by," she said.

"Good-by."

She turned and went gingerly down the gangway, taking short steps. When she got to the deck of the tender she didn't look for Katy, but walked right to the stern of the boat, where there was a semicircular bench, and put down her bag, and then stood and looked up at the ship. It seemed enormous, and at first she couldn't make out where the second-cabin decks were at all. The band was playing somewhere above her, in the night, and the decks were lined with people waving handkerchiefs. They were shouting, too. She ran her eyes to and fro over the crowds, looking for Mr. Camp, but she couldn't find him, anywhere. Maybe he wouldn't come. Then the gangway was hauled down, the bells rang, and the tender began chugging.

Just at that minute she finally saw him. He had got a little open space of railing all to himself, and was leaning way out, waving his arm. She felt as if her heart was going to break, and threw him three long kisses, and he threw three long kisses back. The steamship-whistle began blowing, the tender drew away very fast, but she could still see him waving his arm. Then she couldn't see any more, because the tears came into her eyes, and she sat down and waited for Katy to come, and turned her head away from the ship and wished she were dead.

I'M A FOOL [1]

by SHERWOOD ANDERSON

SHERWOOD ANDERSON was born in Ohio in 1876. By turns he worked on farms, in factories, volunteered for the Spanish-American War, frequented race tracks, went for a time to college, succeeded and failed as a factory owner, and wrote advertising. Past forty, he turned to story telling. He is at present editor of the *Smyth County News* and the *Marion Democrat* in Virginia. What Edgar Lee Masters did in poetry and Sinclair Lewis in the novel, Sherwood Anderson has done in the short story: he has revealed the inner lives of people who live in our mid-western American towns. Among his books are *Winesburg, Ohio,* short stories; *A Story-Teller's Story,* autobiography; *Poor White* and *Dark Laughter,* novels.

IT WAS a hard jolt for me, one of the most bitterest I ever had to face. And it all came about through my own foolishness, too. Even yet sometimes, when I think of it, I want to cry or swear or kick myself. Perhaps, even now, after all this time, there will be a kind of satisfaction in making myself look cheap by telling of it.

It began at three o'clock one October afternoon as I sat in the grand stand at the fall trotting and pacing meet at Sandusky, Ohio.

To tell the truth, I felt a little foolish that I should be sitting in the grand stand at all. During the summer before I had left my home town with Harry Whitehead and, with a nigger named Burt, had taken a job as swipe with one of the two horses Harry was campaigning through the fall race meets that year. Mother cried and

[1] From *Horses and Men* by Sherwood Anderson. New York, The Viking Press. Copyright by B. W. Huebsch, Inc., 1923.

my sister Mildred, who wanted to get a job as a school-teacher in our town that fall, stormed and scolded about the house all during the week before I left. They both thought it something disgraceful that one of our family should take a place as a swipe with race horses. I've an idea Mildred thought my taking the place would stand in the way of her getting the job she'd been working so long for.

But, after all, I had to work, and there was no other work to be got. A big lumbering fellow of nineteen couldn't just hang around the house and I had got too big to mow people's lawns and sell newspapers. Little chaps who could get next to people's sympathies by their size were always getting jobs away from me. There was one fellow who kept saying to every one who wanted a lawn mowed or a cistern cleaned, that he was saving money to work his way through college, and I used to lay awake nights thinking up ways to injure him without being found out. I kept thinking of wagons running over him and bricks falling on his head as he walked along the street. But never mind him.

I got the place with Harry and I liked Burt fine. We got along splendid together. He was a big nigger with a lazy sprawling body and soft, kind eyes, and when it came to a fight he could hit like Jack Johnson. He had Bucephalus, a big black pacing stallion that could do 2.09 or 2.10, if he had to, and I had a little gelding named Doctor Fritz that never lost a race all fall when Harry wanted him to win.

We set out from home late in July in a box car with the two horses, and after that, until late November, we kept moving along to the race meets and the fairs. It was a peachy time for me, I'll say that. Sometimes now I think that boys who are raised regular in houses, and never have

a fine nigger like Burt for best friend, and go to high schools and college, and never steal anything, or get drunk a little, or learn to swear from fellows who know how, or come walking up in front of a grand stand in their shirt sleeves and with dirty horsy pants on when the races are going on and the grand stand is full of people all dressed up— What's the use of talking about it? Such fellows don't know nothing at all. They've never had no opportunity.

But I did. Burt taught me how to rub down a horse and put the bandages on after a race and steam a horse out and a lot of valuable things for any man to know. He could wrap a bandage on a horse's leg so smooth that if it had been the same color you would think it was his skin, and I guess he'd have been a big driver, too, and got to the top like Murphy and Walter Cox and the others if he hadn't been black.

Gee whizz! it was fun. You got to a county-seat town, maybe say on a Saturday or Sunday, and the fair began the next Tuesday and lasted until Friday afternoon. Doctor Fritz would be, say, in the 2.25 trot on Tuesday afternoon and on Thursday afternoon Bucephalus would knock 'em cold in the "free-for-all" pace. It left you a lot of time to hang around and listen to horse talk, and see Burt knock some yap cold that got too gay, and you'd find out about horses and men and pick up a lot of stuff you could use all the rest of your life, if you had some sense and salted down what you heard and felt and saw.

And then at the end of the week when the race meet was over, and Harry had run home to tend up to his livery-stable business, you and Burt hitched the two horses to carts and drove slow and steady across country, to the place for the next meeting, so as to not overheat the horses, etc., etc., you know.

Gee whizz! Gosh amighty! the nice hickory-nut and beechnut and oaks and other kinds of trees along the roads, all brown and red, and the good smells, and Burt singing a song called "Deep River," and the country girls at the windows of houses and everything. You can stick your colleges up your nose for all me. I guess I know where I got my education.

Why, one of those little burgs of towns you come to on the way, say now on a Saturday afternoon, and Burt says, "Let's lay up here." And you did.

And you took the horses to a livery stable and fed them, and you got your good clothes out of a box and put them on.

And the town was full of farmers gaping, because they could see you were race-horse people, and the kids maybe never see a nigger before and was afraid and run away when the two of us walked down their main street.

And that was before prohibition and all that foolishness, and so you went into a saloon, the two of you, and all the yaps come and stood around, and there was always some one pretended he was horsy and knew things and spoke up and began asking questions, and all you did was to lie and lie all you could about what horses you had, and I said I owned them, and then some fellow said, "Will you have a drink of whisky?" and Burt knocked his eye out the way he could say, offhand like, "Oh, well, all right, I'm agreeable to a little nip. I'll split a quart with you." Gee whizz!

But that isn't what I want to tell my story about. We got home late in November and I promised mother I'd quit the race horses for good. There's a lot of things you've got to promise a mother because she don't know any better.

And so, there not being any work in our town any more

than when I left there to go to the races, I went off to Sandusky and got a pretty good place taking care of horses for a man who owned a teaming and delivery and storage and coal and real-estate business there. It was a pretty good place with good eats, and a day off each week, and sleeping on a cot in a big barn, and mostly just shoveling in hay and oats to a lot of big good-enough skates of horses that couldn't have trotted a race with a toad. I wasn't dissatisfied and I could send money home.

And then, as I started to tell you, the fall races come to Sandusky and I got the day off and I went. I left the job at noon and had on my good clothes and my new brown derby hat I'd bought the Saturday before, and a stand-up collar.

First of all I went downtown and walked about with the dudes. I've always thought to myself, "put up a good front" and so I did it. I had forty dollars in my pocket and so I went into the West House, a big hotel, and walked up to the cigar stand. "Give me three twenty-five cent cigars," I said. There was a lot of horsemen and strangers and dressed-up people from other towns standing around in the lobby and in the bar, and I mingled amongst them. In the bar there was a fellow with a cane and a Windsor tie on, that it made me sick to look at him. I like a man to be a man and dress up, but not to go put on that kind of airs. So I pushed him aside, kind of rough, and had me a drink of whisky. And then he looked at me, as though he thought maybe he'd get gay, but he changed his mind and didn't say anything. And then I had another drink of whisky, just to show him something, and went out and had a hack out to the races, all to myself, and when I got there I bought myself the best seat I could get up in the grand stand, but didn't go in for any of these boxes. That's putting on too many airs.

And so there I was, sitting up in the grand stand as gay as you please and looking down on the swipes coming out with their horses, and with their dirty horsy pants on and the horse blankets swung over their shoulders, same as I had been doing all the year before. I liked one thing about the same as the other, sitting up there and feeling grand and being down there and looking up at the yaps and feeling grander and more important, too.

One thing's about as good as another, if you take it just right. I've often said that.

Well, right in front of me, in the grand stand that day, there was a fellow with a couple of girls and they was about my age. The young fellow was a nice guy, all right. He was the kind maybe that goes to college and then comes to be a lawyer or maybe a newspaper editor or something like that, but he wasn't stuck on himself. There are some of that kind are all right and he was one of the ones.

He had his sister with him and another girl and the sister looked around over his shoulder, accidental at first, not intending to start anything—she wasn't that kind—and her eyes and mine happened to meet.

You know how it is. Gee! she was a peach! She had on a soft dress, kind of a blue stuff, and it looked carelessly made, but was well sewed and made and everything. I knew that much. I blushed when she looked right at me and so did she. She was the nicest girl I've ever seen in my life. She wasn't stuck on herself and she could talk proper grammar without being like a school-teacher or something like that. What I mean is, she was O.K. I think maybe her father was well-to-do, but not rich to make her chesty because she was his daughter, as some are. Maybe he owned a drug store or a drygoods store in their home

town, or something like that. She never told me and I never asked.

My own people are all O.K., too, when you come to that. My grandfather was Welsh and over in the old country, in Wales he was— But never mind that.

The first heat of the first race come off and the young fellow setting there with the two girls left them and went down to make a bet. I knew what he was up to, but he didn't talk big and noisy and let every one around know he was a sport, as some do. He wasn't that kind. Well, he come back and I heard him tell the two girls what horse he'd bet on, and when the heat was trotted they all half got to their feet and acted in the excited, sweaty way people do when they've got money down on a race, and the horse they bet on is up there pretty close at the end, and they think maybe he'll come on with a rush, but he never does because he hasn't got the old juice in him, come right down to it.

And then, pretty soon, the horses came out for the 2.18 pace and there was a horse in it I knew. He was a horse Bob French had in his string, but Bob didn't own him. He was a horse owned by a Mr. Mathers down at Marietta, Ohio.

This Mr. Mathers had a lot of money and owned some coal mines or something, and he had a swell place out in the country, and he was stuck on race horses, but was a Presbyterian or something, and I think more than likely his wife was one, too, maybe a stiffer one than himself. So he never raced his horses hisself, and the story round the Ohio race tracks was that when one of his horses got ready to go to the races he turned him over to Bob French and pretended to his wife he was sold.

So Bob had the horses and he did pretty much as he

pleased, and you can't blame Bob; at least, I never did. Sometimes he was out to win and sometimes he wasn't. I never cared much about that when I was swiping a horse. What I did want to know was that my horse had the speed and could go out in front, if you wanted him to.

And, as I'm telling you, there was Bob in this race with one of Mr. Mathers' horses, was named About Ben Ahem or something like that, and was fast as a streak. He was a gelding and had a mark of 2.21, but could step in .08 or .09.

Because when Burt and I were out, as I've told you, the year before, there was a nigger, Burt knew, worked for Mr. Mathers, and we went out there one day when we didn't have no race on at the Marietta Fair and our boss Harry was gone home.

And so every one was gone to the fair but just this one nigger and he took us all through Mr. Mathers' swell house and he and Burt tapped a bottle of wine Mr. Mathers had hid in his bedroom, back in a closet, without his wife knowing, and he showed us his Ahem horse. Burt was always stuck on being a driver, but didn't have much chance to get to the top, being a nigger, and he and the other nigger gulped that whole bottle of wine and Burt got a little lit up.

So the nigger let Burt take this About Ben Ahem and step him a mile in a track Mr. Mathers had all to himself, right there on the farm. And Mr. Mathers had one child, a daughter, kinda sick and not very good-looking, and she came home and we had to hustle and get About Ben Ahem stuck back in the barn.

I'm only telling you to get everything straight. At Sandusky, that afternoon I was at the fair, this young fellow with the two girls was fussed, being with the girls

and losing his bet. You know how a fellow is that way. One of them was his girl and the other his sister. I had figured that out.

"Gee whizz!" I says to myself, "I'm going to give him the dope."

He was mighty nice when I touched him on the shoulder. He and the girls were nice to me right from the start and clear to the end. I'm not blaming them.

And so he leaned back and I give him the dope on About Ben Ahem. "Don't bet a cent on this first heat because he'll go like an oxen hitched to a plow, but when the first heat is over go right down and lay on your pile." That's what I told him.

Well, I never saw a fellow treat any one sweller. There was a fat man sitting beside the little girl, that had looked at me twice by this time, and I at her, and both blushing, and what did he do but have the nerve to turn and ask the fat man to get up and change places with me so I could set with his crowd.

Gee whizz! Craps amighty! There I was. What a chump I was to go and get gay up there in the West House bar, and just because that dude was standing there with a cane and that kind of a necktie on, to go and get all balled up and drink that whisky, just to show off!

Of course she would know, me sitting right beside her and letting her smell of my breath. I could have kicked myself right down out of that grand stand and all around that race track and made a faster record than most of the skates of horses they had there that year.

Because that girl wasn't any mutt of a girl. What wouldn't I have give right then for a stick of chewing gum to chew, or a lozenger, or some liquorice, or most anything. I was glad I had those twenty-five-cent cigars in my pocket and right away I give that fellow one and lit

one myself. Then that fat man got up and we changed places and there I was, plunked right down beside her.

They introduced themselves and the fellow's best girl, he had with him, was named Miss Elinor Woodbury, and her father was a manufacturer of barrels from a place called Tiffin, Ohio. And the fellow himself was named Wilbur Wessen and his sister was Miss Lucy Wessen.

I suppose it was their having such swell names got me off my trolley. A fellow, just because he has been a swipe with a race horse, and works taking care of horses for a man in the teaming, delivery, and storage business, isn't any better or worse than any one else. I've often thought that, and said it, too.

But you know how a fellow is. There's something in that kind of nice clothes, and the kind of nice eyes she had, and the way she had looked at me, a while before, over her brother's shoulder, and me looking back at her, and both of us blushing.

I couldn't show her up for a boob, could I?

I made a fool of myself, that's what I did. I said my name was Walter Mathers from Marietta, Ohio, and then I told all three of them the smashingest lie you ever heard. What I said was that my father owned the horse About Ben Ahem and that he had let him out to this Bob French for racing purposes, because our family was proud and had never gone into racing that way—in our own name, I mean. Then I had got started and they were all leaning over and listening, and Miss Lucy Wessen's eyes were shining, and I went the whole hog.

I told about our place down at Marietta, and about the big stables and the grand brick house we had on a hill, up above the Ohio River, but I knew enough not to do it in no bragging way. What I did was to start things and then let them drag the rest out of me. I acted just as reluctant

to tell as I could. Our family hasn't got any barrel factory, and, since I've known us, we've always been pretty poor, but not asking anything of any one at that, and my grandfather, over in Wales— But never mind that.

We set there talking like we had known each other for years and years, and I went and told them that my father had been expecting maybe this Bob French wasn't on the square, and had sent me up to Sandusky on the sly to find out what I could.

And I bluffed it through I had found out all about the 2.18 pace, in which About Ben Ahem was to start.

I said he would lose the first heat by pacing like a lame cow and then he would come back and skin 'em alive after that. And to back up what I said I took thirty dollars out of my pocket and handed it to Mr. Wilbur Wessen and asked him would he mind, after the first heat, to go down and place it on About Ben Ahem for whatever odds he could get. What I said was that I didn't want Bob French to see me, and none of the swipes.

Sure enough, the first heat came off and About Ben Ahem went off his stride, up the back stretch, and looked like a wooden horse or a sick one, and come in to be last. Then this Wilbur Wessen went down to the betting place under the grand stand and there I was with the two girls, and when that Miss Woodbury was looking the other way once, Lucy Wessen kinda, with her shoulder you know, kinda touched me. Not just tucking down, I don't mean. You know how a woman can do. They get close, but not getting gay, either. You know what they do. Gee whizz!

And then they give me a jolt. What they had done, when I didn't know, was to get together, and they had decided Wilbur Wessen would bet fifty dollars, and the two girls had gone and put in ten dollars each, of their own money, too. I was sick then, but I was sicker later.

About the gelding, About Ben Ahem, and their winning their money, I wasn't worried a lot about that. It come out O. K. Ahem stepped the next three heats like a bushel of spoiled eggs going to market before they could be found out, and Wilbur Wessen had got nine to two for the money. There was something else eating at me.

Because Wilbur come back, after he had bet the money, and after that he spent most of his time talking to that Miss Woodbury, and Lucy Wessen and I was left alone together like on a desert island. Gee! if I'd only been on the square or if there had been any way of getting myself on the square. There ain't any Walter Mathers, like I said to her and them, and there hasn't ever been one, but if there was, I bet I'd go to Marietta, Ohio, and shoot him tomorrow.

There I was, big boob that I am. Pretty soon the race was over, and Wilbur had gone down and collected our money, and we had a hack downtown, and he stood us a swell supper at the West House, and a bottle of champagne beside.

And I was with that girl and she wasn't saying much, and I wasn't saying much, either. One thing I know. She wasn't stuck on me because of the lie about my father being rich and all that. There's a way you know. . . . Craps amighty! There's a kind of a girl you see just once in your life, and if you don't get busy and make hay, then you're gone for good and all, and might as well go jump off a bridge. They give you a look from inside of them somewhere, and it ain't no vamping, and what it means is—you want that girl to be your wife, and you want nice things around her like flowers and swell clothes, and you want her to have the kids you're going to have, and you want good music played and no ragtime. Gee whizz!

There's a place over near Sandusky, across a kind of

bay, and it's called Cedar Point. And after we had supper we went over to it in a launch, all by ourselves. Wilbur and Miss Lucy and that Miss Woodbury had to catch a ten-o'clock train back to Tiffin, Ohio, because when you're out with girls like that you can't get careless and miss any trains and stay out all night, like you can with some kind of Janes.

And Wilbur blowed himself to the launch and it cost him fifteen cold plunks, but I wouldn't never have knew if I hadn't listened. He wasn't no tin-horn kind of a sport.

Over at the Cedar Point place, we didn't stay around where there was a gang of common kind of cattle at all.

There was big dance halls and dining places for yaps, and there was a beach you could walk along and get where it was dark, and we went there.

She didn't talk hardly at all, and neither did I, and I was thinking how glad I was my mother was all right, and always made us kids learn to eat with a fork at table, and not swill soup, and not be noisy and rough like a gang you see around a race track that way.

Then Wilbur and his girl went away up the beach and Lucy and I sat down in a dark place, where there was some roots of old trees the water had washed up, and after that the time, till we had to go back in the launch and they had to catch their train, wasn't nothing at all. It went like winking your eye.

Here's how it was. The place we were setting in was dark, like I said, and there was the roots from that old stump sticking up like arms, and there was a watery smell, and then the night was like—as if you could put your hand out and feel it—so warm and soft and dark and sweet like an orange.

I most cried and I most swore and I most jumped up and danced, I was so mad and happy and sad.

When Wilbur came back from being alone with his girl, and she saw him coming, Lucy she says, "We got to go to the train now," and she was most crying, too, but she never knew nothing I knew, and she couldn't be so all busted up. And then, before Wilbur and Miss Woodbury got up to where we was, she put her face up and kissed me and she was all quivering and— Gee whizz!

Sometimes I hope I have cancer and die. I guess you know what I mean. We went in the launch across the bay to the train like that, and it was dark, too. She whispered and said it was like she and I could get out of the boat and walk on the water, and it sounded foolish, but I knew what she meant.

And then quick we were right at the depot, and there was a big gang of yaps, the kind that goes to the fairs, and crowded and milling around like cattle, and how could I tell her? "It won't be long because you'll write and I'll write to you." That's all she said.

I got a chance like a hay-barn afire. A swell chance I got.

And maybe she would write me, down at Marietta that way, and the letter would come back, and stamped on the front of it by the U.S.A. "there ain't any such guy," or something like that, whatever they stamp on a letter that way.

And me trying to pass myself off for a big bug and a swell—to her, as decent a little body as God ever made. Craps amighty! a swell chance I got!

And then the train come in, and she got on it, and Wilbur Wessen he come and shook hands with me, and that Miss Woodbury was nice too and bowed to me, and I at her, and the train went and I busted out and cried like a kid.

Gee! I could have run after that train and made Dan Patch look like a freight train after a wreck, but, socks amighty! what was the use? Did you ever see such a fool?

I'll bet you what—if I had an arm broke right now or a train had run over my foot—I wouldn't go to no doctor at all. I'd go set down and let her hurt and hurt—that's what I'd do. I'll bet you what—if I hadn't 'a' drunk that booze I'd 'a' never been such a boob as to go tell such a lie —that couldn't never be made straight to a lady like her.

I wish I had that fellow right here that had on a Windsor tie and carried a cane. I'd smash him for fair. Gosh darn his eyes! He's a big fool—that's what he is.

And if I'm not another you just go find me one and I'll quit working and be a bum and give him my job. I don't care nothing for working, and earning money and saving it for no such boob as myself.

THE MAN WHO MISSED THE BUS [1]

by STELLA BENSON

STELLA BENSON was born in England in 1892. She received her education at home but since then has traveled widely in Switzerland, France, Germany and China. For two years she lived in America. The story included here is comparatively recent but it has caused a good deal of comment, particularly in England. It is a striking example of what has been in the last few years a popular method of handling an idea in a short story—half-veiled, vague, almost formless, the structure and actual writing of the story are meant to reflect organically the difficult subject-matter represented in Mr. Robinson. Among Stella Benson's books are *This Is the End, Living Alone, The Poor Man, The Little World* and *Good-Bye Stranger.*

MR. ROBINSON'S temper was quite sore by the time he reached St. Pierre. The two irritations that most surely found the weak places in his nervous defenses were noise and light in his eyes. And, as he told Monsieur Dupont, the proprietor of Les Trois Moineaux at St. Pierre, "If there is one thing, monsieur, that is offensive—essentially offensive—that is to say, a danger in itself—I mean to say noise doesn't have to have a meaning. . . . What I mean is, monsieur, that noise—"

"*Numéro trente,*" said Monsieur Dupont to the chasseur.

Mr. Robinson always had to explain things very thoroughly in order to make people really appreciate the force of what he had to say; and even then it was a hard task

[1] From *Harper's Magazine,* March, 1929. Copyright, 1929, Harper & Brothers, New York. By permission of the author.

to get them to acknowledge receipt, so to speak, of his message. But he was a humble man, and he accounted for the atmosphere of unanswered and unfinished remarks in which he lived by admitting that his words were unfortunately always inadequate to convey to a fellow-mortal the intense interest to be found in the curiosities of behavior and sensation. His mind was overstocked with by-products of the business of life. He felt that every moment disclosed a new thing worth thinking of among the phenomena that his senses presented to him. Other people, he saw, let these phenomenal moments slip by unanalyzed; but if he had had the words and the courage, he felt, he could have awakened those of his fellow-creatures whom he met from their trance of shallow living. As it was, the relation of his explorations and wonderings sounded, even to his own ears, flat as the telling at breakfast of an ecstatic dream.

What he had meant to say about noise, for instance, had been that noise was *in itself* terrifying and horrible—not as a warning of danger but as a physical assault. Vulgar people treat noise only as a language that *means* something, he would have said, but really noise could not be translated, any more than rape could be translated. There was no such thing as an ugly harmless noise. The noise of an express train approaching and shrieking through a quiet station; the noise of heavy rain sweeping towards one through a forest; the noise of loud concerted laughter at an unheard joke—all benevolent noises if translated into concrete terms, were *in themselves* calamities. All this Mr. Robinson would have thought worth saying to Monsieur Dupont—worth continuing to say until Monsieur Dupont should have confessed to an understanding of his meaning; but as usual the words collapsed as soon as they left Mr. Robinson's lips.

Monsieur Dupont stood in the doorway of Les Trois

Moineaux with his back to the light. Mr. Robinson could see the shape of his head set on stooping shoulders, with a little frail fluff of hair beaming round a baldness. He could see the rather crumpled ears with outleaning lobes bulging sharply against the light. But between ear and ear, between bald brow and breast he could see nothing but a black blank against the glare. Mr. Robinson had extremely acute sight—perhaps too acute, as he often wanted to tell people, since this was perhaps why the light in his eyes affected him so painfully.

"If my sight were less acute," he would have said, "I should not mind a glare so much—I mean to say, my eyes are so extremely receptive that they receive too much, or in other words the same cause that makes my eyes so very sensitive is . . ."

But nobody ever leaned forward eagerly and said, "I understand you perfectly, Mr. Robinson, and what you say is most interesting. Your sight includes so much that it cannot exclude excessive light, and this very naturally irritates your nerves, though the same peculiarity accounts for your intense powers of observation." Nobody ever said anything like that, but then, people are so self-engrossed.

Mr. Robinson was not self-engrossed—he was simply extravagantly interested in *things*, not people. For instance, he looked round now, as the chasseur sought in the shadows for his suitcase, and saw the terrace striped by long beams of light—broad flat beams that were strung like yellow sheets from every window and door in the hotel to the trees, tall urns, and tables of the terrace. A murmur of voices enlivened the air, but there were no human creatures in any beam—only blocked dark figures in the shadows—and, in every patch of light, a sleeping dog or cat or two. Dogs and cats lay extended or curled comfortably on the warm uneven paving stones, and Mr. Rob-

inson's perfect sight absorbed the shape of every brown, tortoise-shell, or black marking on their bodies, as a geographer might accept the continents on a new unheard-of globe.

"It's just like geography—the markings on animals," Mr. Robinson had once said to an American who couldn't get away. "What I mean to say is that the markings on a dog or a rabbit have just as much sense as the markings on this world of ours—or in other words the archipelagoes of spots on this pointer puppy are just as importantly isolated from one another as they could be in any Adriatic sea."

But the American had only replied, "Why, no, Mr. Robinson, not half so important; I am taking my wife, with the aid of the American Express Company, to visit the Greek islands this summer; and we shall be sick on the sea and robbed on the land—whereas nobody but a flea ever visits the spots on that puppy, and the flea don't know and don't care a damn what color he bites into." Showing that nobody except Mr. Robinson ever really studied things impersonally.

Mr. Robinson, a very ingenious-minded and sensitive man with plenty of money, was always seeking new places to go to, where he might be a success—or rather, where his unaccountable failures elsewhere might not be known. St. Pierre, he thought, was an excellent venture, although the approach to it had been so trying. As soon as he had heard of it—through reading a short thoughtless sketch by a popular novelist in the *Daily Call*—he had felt hopeful about it. A little Provençal walled town on a hill, looking out over vineyards to the blue Mediterranean; a perfect little hotel—clean and with a wonderful cook—frequented by an interesting few. . . .

"By the time I get downstairs," thought Mr. Robinson

as he carefully laid his trousers under the mattress in his room and donned another pair, "the lights will be lighted on the terrace, and I shall be able to see my future friends. I must tell some one about that curious broken reflection in the river Rhone."

He went downstairs and out onto the terrace, where the tinkle of glasses and plates made him feel hungry. He could hear, as he stood in the doorway looking out, one man's voice making a series of jokes in quick succession, each excited pause in his voice being filled by a gust and scrape of general laughter—like waves breaking on a beach with a clatter and then recoiling with a thin, hopeful, lonely sound. "Probably all his jokes are personalities," thought Mr. Robinson, "and, therefore, not essentially funny. No doubt they are slightly pornographic, at that. When will people learn how interesting and exciting *things* are? . . ."

A waiter behind him drew out a chair from a table in one of the squares of light thrown from a window. Mr. Robinson, after sitting down abstractedly, was just going to call the waiter back to tell him that his eyes were ultrasensitive to light and that he could see nothing in that glare, when a large dog, with the bleached, patched, innocent face of a circus clown, came and laid its head on his knee. Mr. Robinson could never bear to disappoint an animal. He attributed to animals all the hot and cold variations of feeling that he himself habitually experienced, identifying the complacent fur of the brute with his own thin human skin. So that when the waiter, coming quietly behind him, put the wine list into his hand, Mr. Robinson merely said, "Thank you, garçon, but I never touch alcohol in any form—or, for the matter of that, tobacco either. In my opinion—" and did not call the rapidly escaping waiter back to ask him to move his table.

The dog's chin was now comfortably pressed against his knee, and the dog's paw hooked in a pathetically prehensile way about his ankle.

Mr. Robinson made the best of his position in the dazzle and tried to look about him. The Trois Moineaux was built just outside the encircling wall of the tightly corseted little town of St. Pierre and, since St. Pierre clung to the apex of a conical hill, it followed that the inn terrace jutted boldly out over a steep, stepped fall of vineyards overhanging the plain. The plain was very dim now, overlaid by starlit darkness, yet at the edge of the terrace there was a sense of *view*, and all the occupied tables stood in a row against the low wall, diluting the food and drink they bore with starlight and space. The men and women sitting at these tables all had their faces to the world and their backs to Mr. Robinson. He could not see a single human face. He had come down too late to secure one of the outlooking tables, and his place was imprisoned in a web of light under an olive tree. In the middle of the table, peaches and green grapes were heaped on a one-legged dish. And on the edge of the dish a caterpillar waved five-sixths of its length drearily in the air, unable to believe that its world could really end at this abrupt slippery rim. Mr. Robinson, shading his eyes from the light, could see every detail of the caterpillar's figure, and it seemed to him worth many minutes of absorbed attention. Its color was a pale greenish-fawn, and it had two dark bumps on its brow by way of eyes.

"How unbearably difficult and lonely its life would seem to us," thought Mr. Robinson, leaning intensely over it. "How frightful if by mistake the merest spark of self-consciousness should get into an insect's body (an accidental short-circuit in the life current, perhaps), and it should know itself absolutely alone—appallingly free."

He put his finger in the range of its persistent wavings and watched it crawl with a looping haste down his fingernail, accepting without question a quite fortuitous salvation from its dilemma. He laid his finger against a leaf, and the caterpillar disembarked briskly after its journey across alien elements. When it was gone, Mr. Robinson looked about him, dazed. "My goodness," he thought, "that caterpillar's face is the only one I have seen tonight!"

The noise of chatter and laughter went up like a kind of smoke from the flickering creatures at the tables near the edge of the terrace. At each table the heads and shoulders of men and women leaned together—were sucked together like flames in a common upward draft. "My dear, she looked like a . . . Oh, well, if you want to. . . . He's the kind of man who . . . *No*, my dear, not in my *bedroom*. . . . A rattling good yarn. . . . Stop me if I've told you this one before. . . ." One man, standing up a little unsteadily facing the table nearest to Mr. Robinson, made a speech: " . . . the last time . . . delightful company . . . fair sex . . . happiest hours of my life . . . mustn't waste your time . . . us mere men . . . as the Irishman said to the Scotchman when . . . happiest moments of all my life . . . one minute and I shall be done . . . always remember the happiest days of all my . . . well, I mustn't keep you . . . I heard a little story the other day. . . ." And all the time his audience leaned together round their table, embarrassed, looking away over the dark plain or murmuring together with bent heads.

The only woman whose face Mr. Robinson might have seen was shielding her face with her hands and shaking with silent laughter. The speaker was wavering on his feet very much as the caterpillar had wavered on its tail, and

his wide gestures, clawing the air in search of the attention of his friends, suggested to Mr. Robinson the caterpillar's wild gropings for foothold where no foothold was. "Yes," thought Mr. Robinson, "the caterpillar was *my* host. No other face is turned to me."

However, as he thought this, a man came from a farther table and stood quite close, under the olive tree, between Mr. Robinson and the lighted doorway, looking down on him. The man stretched out his hand to the tree and leaned upon it. A freak of light caught the broad short hand, walnut-knuckled and brown, crooked over the bough. Mr. Robinson could not see the man's face at all, but he felt that the visit was friendly. To conciliate this sympathetic stranger, he would even have talked about the weather, or made a joke about pretty girls or beer; but he could not think of anything of that kind to say to a man whose hand, grasping an olive bough, was all that could be known of him. All that Mr. Robinson could do for the moment was to wonder what could have sent the man here. "It could not have been," thought Mr. Robinson humbly, "that he was attracted by my face, because nobody ever is." And then he began thinking how one man's loss is nearly always another man's gain, if considered broadly enough. For one to be forsaken, really, means that another has a new friend.

"This young man," thought Mr. Robinson, gazing at the black outline of the stranger's head, "has probably come here blindly, because of some sudden hurt, some stab, some insult, inflicted by his friends at that table over there—probably by a woman. Perhaps he thinks he has a broken heart (for he has young shoulders). Nothing short of a wound that temporarily robbed him of his social balance could make him do so strange a thing as suddenly to leave his friends and come here to stand silent by me in

the shade. Yet if he only could—as some day, I am convinced, we all shall—know that the sum remains the same—that some other lover is the happier for this loss of his—and that if he had gained a smile from her, the pain he now feels would simply have been shifted to another heart—not dispelled . . . We only have to think impersonally enough, and even death—well, we are all either nearly dead or just born, more or less, and the balance of birth and death never appreciably alters. Personal thinking is the curse of existence. Why are we all crushed under the weight of this strangling *me*—this snake in our garden . . . ?"

So he said to the young man, "Isn't it a curious thing, looking round at young people and old people, that it doesn't really matter if they are born or dead—I mean to say, it's all the same whatever happens, if you follow me, and so many people mind when they needn't, if people would only realize—" At this moment there was a burst of clapping from the far table and the young man bounded from Mr. Robinson's side back to his friends, shouting, "Good egg—have you thought of a word already? Animal, vegetable, or mineral—and remember to speak up because I'm rather hard of hearing."

Mr. Robinson suddenly felt like Herbert Robinson, personally affronted. The sum of happiness (which of course remained unaltered by his setback) for a moment did not matter in the least. He pushed back his chair and walked away, leaving his cheese uneaten and the clown-faced dog without support. He went to his bedroom and sat down opposite his mirror, facing the reflection of his outward *me*. There sat the figure in the mirror, smooth, plump, pale, with small pouched eyes and thick, straight, wet-looking hair.

"What is this?" asked Mr. Robinson, studying the re-

flection of his disappointed face—the only human face he had seen that evening. "Look at me—I *am* alive—I am indeed very acutely alive—more alive, perhaps, than all these men and women half-blind—half-dead in their limitations of greed and sex. . . . It is true I have no personal claim on life; I am a virgin and I have no friends—yet I live intensely—and there are—there *are—there are* other forms of life than personal life. The eagle and the artichoke are equally alive; and perhaps my way of life is nearer to the eagle's than the artichoke's. And must I be alone—must I live behind cold shoulders because I see *out* instead of *in*—the most vivid form of life conceivable, if only it could be lived perfectly?"

He tried to see himself in the mirror, as was his habit, as a mere pliable pillar of life, a turret of flesh with a prisoner called *life* inside it. He stared himself out of countenance, trying, as it were, to dissolve his poor body by understanding it—poor white, sweating, rubbery thing that was called Herbert Robinson and had no friends. But tonight the prisoner called *life* clung to his prison—tonight his body tingled with egotism—tonight the oblivion that he called wisdom would not come, and he could not become conscious, as he longed to, of the live sky above the roof, the long winds streaming about the valleys, the billions of contented, wary, or terrified creatures moving about the living dust, weeds, and waters of the world. He remained just Herbert Robinson who had not seen any human face while in the midst of his fellow men.

He began to feel an immediate craving—an almost revengeful lust—to be alone, far from men, books, mirrors, and lights, watching, all his life long, the bodiless, mindless movements of animals—ecstatic living things possessing no *me*. "I should scarcely know I was alive, then, and perhaps never even notice when I died. . . ." He decided he

would go away next day, and give no group again the chance to excommunicate him.

He remembered that he had seen a notice at the door of the hotel giving the rare times at which an auto-bus left and arrived at St. Pierre. "I will leave by the early bus, before any one is awake to turn his back on me."

He could not sleep, but lay uneasily on his bed reading the advertisements in a magazine he had brought with him. Advertisements always comforted him a good deal, because advertisers really, he thought, took a broad view; they wrote of—and to—their fellow men cynically and subtly, taking advantage of the vulgar passion for personal address, and yet treating humanity as one intricate mass—an instrument to be played upon. This seemed the ideal standpoint to Mr. Robinson, and yet he was insulted by the isolation such an ideal involved.

He dressed himself early, replaced in his suitcase the few clothes he had taken out, put some notes in an envelope addressed to Monsieur Dupont, and leaned out of the window to watch for the bus. St. Pierre, a sheaf of white-and-pink plaster houses, was woven together on a hill, like a haycock. The town, though compact and crowned by a sharp white bell-tower, seemed to have melted a little, like a thick candle; the centuries and the sun had softened its fortress outlines. The other hills, untopped by towns, seemed much more definitely constructed; they were austerely built of yellow and green blocks of vineyard, cemented by the dusty green of olive trees. Gleaming, white fluffy clouds peeped over the hills—"like kittens," thought Mr. Robinson, who had a fancy for trying to make cosmic comparisons between the small and the big. On the terrace of the inn half a dozen dogs sprawled in the early sun. Over the valley a hawk balanced and swung in the air, so hungry after its night's fast that it swooped rashly and

at random several times, and was caught up irritably into the air again after each dash, as though dangling on a plucked thread. Mr. Robinson leaned long on his sill looking at it, until his elbows felt sore from his weight, and he began to wonder where the bus was that was going to take him away to loneliness. He went down to the terrace, carrying his suitcase, and stood in the archway. There was no sound of a coming bus—no sound at all, in fact, except a splashing and a flapping and a murmuring to the left and right of him. A forward step or two showed him that there were two long washing troughs, one on each side of the archway, each trough shaded by a stone gallery and further enclosed in a sort of trellis of leaning kneading women.

Mr. Robinson noticed uneasily that he could not see one woman's face; all were so deeply bent and absorbed. After a moment, however, a woman's voice from the row behind him asked him if he was waiting for the bus. He turned to reply, hoping to break the spell by finding an ingenuous rustic face lifted to look at him. But all the faces were bent once more, and it was another woman behind him again who told him that the bus had left ten minutes before. Once more the speaker bent over her work before Mr. Robinson had time to turn and see her face. "What a curious protracted accident," he thought, and had time to curse his strange isolation before he realized the irritation of being unable to leave St. Pierre for another half dozen hours. He flung his suitcase into the hall of the inn and walked off up a path that led through the vineyards. As if the whole affair had been prearranged, all the dogs on the terrace rose up and followed him, yawning and stretching surreptitiously, like workers reluctantly leaving their homes at the sound of a factory whistle.

Mr. Robinson, true to his habit, concentrated his at-

tention on—or rather diffused it to embrace—the colors about him. The leaves of the vines especially held his eye; they wore the same frosty bloom that grapes themselves often wear—a sky-blue dew on the green leaf. Two magpies, with a bottle-green sheen on their wings, gave their police-rattle cry as he came near and then flew off, flaunting their long tails clumsily. A hundred feet higher, where the ground became too steep even for vines, Mr. Robinson found a grove of gnarled old olive trees, edging a thick wood of Spanish chestnuts. Here he sat down and looked between the tree-trunks and over the distorted shadows at the uneven yellow land and the thin blade of mat-blue sea stabbing the farthest hills. The dogs stood round him, expecting him to rise in a minute and lead them on again. Seeing that he still sat where he was, they wagged their tails tolerantly but invitingly. Finally they resigned themselves to the inevitable and began philosophically walking about the grove, sniffing gently at various points in search of a makeshift stationary amusement.

Mr. Robinson watched them with a growing sense of comfort. "Here," he thought, "are the good undeliberate beasts again; I knew they would save me. They don't shut themselves away from life in their little individualities, or account uniquely for their lusts on the silly ground of personality. Their bodies aren't prisons—they're just dormitories. . . ." He delighted in watching the dogs busily engrossed in being alive without self-consciousness. After all, he thought, he did not really depend on men. (For he had been doubting his prized detachment most painfully.)

One of the dogs discovered a mouse-hole and, after thrusting his nose violently into it to verify the immediacy of the smell, began digging, but not very cleverly because he was too large a dog for such petty sports. The other

dogs hurried to the spot and, having verified the smell for themselves, stood restively round the first discoverer, wearing the irritable look we all wear when watching some one else bungle over something we feel (erroneously) that we could do very much better ourselves. Finally they pushed the original dog aside and began trying to dig, all in the same spot, but, finding this impossible, they tapped different veins of the same lode-smell. Soon a space of some ten feet square was filled with a perfect tornado of flying dust, clods, grass, and piston-like forepaws. Hind legs remained rooted while forelegs did all the work, but whenever the accumulation of earth to the rear of each dog became inconveniently deep, hindlegs, with a few impatient strong strokes, would dash the heap away to some distance—even as far as Mr. Robinson's boots. Quite suddenly all the dogs, with one impulse, admitted themselves beaten; they concluded without rancor that the area was unmistakably mouseless. They signified their contempt for the place in the usual canine manner, and walked away, sniffing, panting, sniffing again for some new excitement.

Mr. Robinson, who had been, for the duration of the affair, a dog in spirit, expecting at every second that a horrified mouse would emerge from this cyclone of attack, imitated his leaders and quieted down with an insouciance equal to theirs. But he had escaped from the menace of humanity; he was eased—he was sleepy. . . .

He slept for a great many hours, and when he awoke the sunlight was slanting down at the same angle as the hill, throwing immense shadows across the vineyards. The dogs had gone home. And there, on a space of flattened earth between two spreading tree-roots, was a mouse and its family. Mr. Robinson, all mouse now, with no memory of his canine past, lay quite still on his side. The mother mouse moved in spasms, stopping to quiver her nose over

invisible interests in the dust. Her brood were like little curled feathers, specks of down blown about by a fitful wind. There seemed to be only one license to move shared by this whole mouse family; when mother stopped, one infant mouse would puff forward, and as soon as its impulse expired, another thistledown brother would glide erratically an inch or two. In this leisurely way the family moved across the space of earth and into the grass, appearing again and again between the green blades. Mr. Robinson lay still, sycophantically reverent.

Between two blades of grass the senior mouse came out onto a little plateau, about eighteen inches away from Mr. Robinson's unwinking eye. At that range Mr. Robinson could see its face as clearly as one sees the face of a wife over a breakfast table. It was a dignified but greedy face; its eyes, in so far as they had any expression at all, expressed a cold heart; its attraction lay in its texture, a delicious velvet—and that the mouse would never allow a human finger, however friendly, to enjoy. It would have guarded its person as a classical virgin guarded her honor. As soon as Mr. Robinson saw the mouse's remote expression he felt as a lost sailor on a sinking ship might feel, who throws his last rope—and no saving hands grasp it.

He heard the sound of human footsteps behind him. There was a tiny explosion of flight beside him—and the mouse family was not there. Through the little grove marched a line of men in single file, going home from their work in the vineyards over the hill. Mr. Robinson sat up and noticed, with a cold heart, that all the men wore the rush hats of the country pulled down against the low last light of the sun, and that not one face was visible.

Mr. Robinson sat for some time with his face in his hands. He felt his eyes with his finger, and the shape of his nose and cheekbone; he bit his finger with his strong teeth.

Here was a face—the only human face in the world. Suddenly craving for the sight of that friend behind the mirror, he got up and walked back to the Trois Moineaux. He found himself very hungry, having starved all day; but his isolation gave him a so much deeper sense of lack than did his empty stomach that, although dinner was in progress among the bands of light and shade on the terrace, his first act was to run to his room and stand before the mirror. There was a mistiness in the mirror. He rubbed it with his hand. The mistiness persisted—a compact haze of blankness that exactly covered the reflection of his face. He moved to a different angle—he moved the mirror—he saw clearly the reflection of the room, of his tweed-clad figure, of his tie, of his suitcase in the middle of the floor; but his face remained erased, like an unsatisfactory charcoal sketch. Filled with an extraordinary fear, he stood facing the mirror for some minutes, feeling with tremulous fingers for his eyes, his lips, his forehead. There seemed to him to be the same sensation of haze in his sense of touch as in his eyesight—a nervelessness—a feeling of nauseating contact with a dead thing. It was like touching with an unsuspecting hand one's own limb numbed by cold or by an accident of position.

Mr. Robinson walked downstairs, dazed, and out onto the terrace. As before, the shadowed tables looking out over the edge of the terrace were already surrounded by laughing, chattering parties. Mr. Robinson took his seat, as before, under the olive tree. "Bring me a bottle of . . . Sauterne," he said to the waiter (for he remembered that his late unmarried sister used to sustain upon this wine a reputation for wit in the boarding house in which she had lived). "And, waiter, isn't there a table free looking out at the view? I can't see anything here." It was not the view he craved, of course, but only a point of vantage from

which to see the faces of his mysterious noisy neighbors. His need for seeing faces was more immediate than ever, now that his one friend had failed him.

"There will be tables free there in a moment," said the waiter. "They are all going to dance soon. They're only waiting for the moon." And the waiter nodded his shadowed face towards a distant hill, behind which—looking at this moment like a great far red fire—the moon was coming up. "Look, the moon, the moon, the moon, look . . ." every one on the terrace was saying. And a few moments later, the moon—now completely round but cut in half by a neat bar of cloud, took flight lightly from the top of the hill.

There was a scraping of chairs, the scraping of a gramophone, and half a dozen couples of young men and women began dancing between the tall Italian urns and the olive trees on the terrace. Mr. Robinson poured himself out a large tumbler of Sauterne. "Waiter, I don't want a table at the edge now—I want one near the dancers—I want to see their faces."

"There are no tables free in the center of the terrace now. Several are vacant at the edge."

"I can see a table there, near the dancers, with only two chairs occupied. Surely I could sit with them."

"That table is taken by a large party, but most of them are dancing. They will come back there in a moment."

Mr. Robinson, disregarding the waiter and clutching his tumbler in one hand and his bottle in the other, strode to the table he had chosen. "I'm *too* lonely—I must sit here."

"So lonely, poo-oo-oor man," said the woman at the table, a stout middle-aged woman with high shoulders and a high bosom clad in saxe-blue sequins. She turned her face towards him in the pink light of the moon. Mr. Robinson,

though desperate, was not surprised. Her face was the same blank—the same terrible disc of nothingness that he had seen in his mirror. Mr. Robinson looked at her companion in dreadful certainty. A twin blank faced him.

"Sh-lonely, eh?" came a thick young voice out of nothingness. "Well, m'lad, you'll be damn sight lonelier yet in minute 'f y' come buttin' in on—"

"Ow, Ronnie," expostulated his frightful friend—but at that moment the gramophone fell silent and the dancers came back to their table. Mr. Robinson scanned the spaces that should have been their faces one by one; they were like discs of dazzle seen after unwisely meeting the eye of the sun.

"This old feller sayzzz—lonely—pinched your chair, Belle—"

"Never mind, duckie," said Belle—and threw herself across Mr. Robinson's knee. "Plenty of room for little me."

The white emptiness of her face that was no face blocked out Mr. Robinson's view of the world.

"Oh, my God!" she cried, jumping up suddenly. "I know why he's lonely—why—the man's not alive. Look at his face!"

"I am—I am—I am—" shouted Mr. Robinson in terror. "I'll show you I am . . ." He lurched after her and dragged her among the dancers as the music began again. He shut his eyes. He could hear her wild animal shrieks of laughter and feel her thin struggling body under his hands.

Mr. Robinson sat, quite still but racked by confusion, excitement, and disgust, beside the road on the wall of a vineyard, watching the last star slip down into the haze that enhaloed the hills. The moon had gone long ago. All

Mr. Robinson's heart was set on catching the bus this morning; to him the dawn that was even now imperceptibly replacing the starlight was only a herald of the bus and of escape. He had no thoughts and no plans beyond catching the bus. He knew that he was cold, but flight would warm him; that he was hungry and thirsty, but flight would nourish him; that he was exhausted and broken-hearted, but flight would ease and comfort him.

A white glow crowned a hill, behind which the sky had long been pearly, and in a minute an unbearably bright ray shot from the hill into Mr. Robinson's eyes. The dazzling domed brow of the sun rose between a tree and a crag, and a lily-white light rushed into the valley.

The bus, crackling and crunching, waddled round the bend. Mr. Robinson hailed it with a distraught cry and gesture.

"*Enfin . . . très peu de places, m'sieu—n'y a qu'un tout p'tit coin par ici . . .*"

Mr. Robinson had no need now to look at the face of the driver, or at the rows of senseless sunlit ghosts that filled the bus. He knew his curse by now. He climbed into the narrow place indicated beside the driver. The bus lurched on down the narrow winding road that overhung the steep vineyards of the valley. Far below—so far below that one could not see the movement of the water—a yellow stream enmeshed its rocks in a net of plaited strands.

Mr. Robinson sat beside the driver, not looking at that phantom faceless face—so insulting to the comfortable sun—but looking only at the road that was leading him to escape. How far to flee he did not know, but all the hope there was, he felt, lay beyond the farthest turn of the road. After one spellbound look at the sun-blinded face of

St. Pierre, clinging to its hivelike hill, he looked forward only, at the winding perilous road.

And his acute eyes saw, in the middle of the way, half a dozen specks of live fur, blowing about a shallow rut. . . . The bus's heavy approach had already caused a certain panic in the mouse family. One atom blew one way, one another; there was a sort of little muddled maze of running mice in the road.

Mr. Robinson's heart seemed to burst. Before he was aware, he had sprung to his feet and seized the wheel of the bus from the driver. He had about twenty seconds in which to watch the mice scuttling into the grass—to watch the low loose wall of the outer edge of the road crumble beneath the plunging weight of the bus. He saw, leaning crazily towards him, the face—the *face*—rolling eyes, tight grinning lips—of the driver, looking down at death. There, far down, was the yellow net of the river, spread to catch them all.

CHILD OF GOD [1]

by ROARK BRADFORD

ROARK BRADFORD is one of the younger American writers who have come out of the south. For that reason it is not surprising to find that his subject-matter is the Negro, not the colored individual we find on the vaudeville stage and in the funny strips, but the real negro as Bradford knew him on the plantation. The story included here is strongly reminiscent of Ambrose Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge." "Child of God" won the O. Henry Memorial Award for 1927. Among Roark Bradford's books are *Ol' Man Adam An' His Chillun* and *This Side of Jordan.*

WHEN Willie told the preacher that morning that "ev'ything is all O.K., Revund," he meant it from the bottom of his heart. The hawking of the rain crow from the limb of the dead cottonwood sounded like the song of a mocking bird. The monotonous patter of rain on the tin roof lulled him into gentle restfulness. The damp, dirty stench that floated up from the dark closeness of the cells below him was like a sedative. Even the lyelike coffee served to remind him that the jailer was his friend.

"Cap'm Archie tole me I could have everything I wanted fer brekfus," he explained as he caught the minister sniffing and eyeing the scant remains of the meal. "An' I tole him I b'lieve I'd take some po'k chops an' cawfee, ef'n hit wuz all right. An' hyar it is."

"You mean dar hit wuz," admonished the preacher. "Now yo' flesh is fed, Willie, whut 'bout yo' soul?"

[1] From *Harper's Magazine* for April, 1927. Copyright, 1927, by Harper & Brothers. Reprinted by permission of the author.

Willie beamed a broad, knowing smile. "My soul," he said tolerantly, "is all O.K. An' Revund," he continued jubilantly, "Cap'm Archie say he gonter bring me a ten-cent cigar to go walkin' up de gallows wid in my mouf." The minister's face was a study in expression. "An' I makes me a speech up yonder"—jerking his arm toward the gallows high in the roof of the jail—"an' den—"

"Den which, son?" Preacher Moore was eager to find a point of contact at which he could begin his prepared message of consolation.

"I'se Glory bound!" Willie declared with enthusiasm.

While the condemned man talked and the preacher listened, the Great State of Louisiana prepared to exact its penalty in the form of the life of Willie Malone because "he did feloniously, wilfully, and of his deliberately premeditated malice aforethought, make an assault on one Thurston Gibbs, and a certain gun which then and there was loaded with gunpowder and buckshot and was by him, the said Willie Malone, had and held in both hands, he, the said Willie Malone, did then and there feloniously and of malice aforethought shoot off and discharge at and upon the said Thurston Gibbs thereby, and by thus striking the said Thurston Gibbs with the buckshots inflicting on and in the body one mortal wound of which said mortal wound the said Thurston Gibbs then and there instantly died. And so the said Willie Malone did in the manner and form aforesaid, feloniously and deliberately premeditated malice aforethought, kill and murder the said Thurston Gibbs in the Parish of Wilton aforesaid, against the peace and dignity of the Great State of Louisiana."

It all came out at the trial. Hogs had been running in Willie's cornfield. The hogs belonged to Mr. Gibbs. And when Willie asked him to keep them home Mr. Gibbs had

cursed him. Willie then bought a shotgun and some buckshot. Everybody agreed upon that much of it. Willie said he aimed to shoot the hogs and that when he heard something rustling the long blades he fired, thinking it was a hog. The district attorney pointed out that it was impossible to get a witness who could say what was in a man's mind and, therefore, he'd leave it to the jury as to whether Willie was hog hunting or man hunting.

The jury was divided upon the point, but all agreed that no nigger had any right to shoot a white man's hogs, anyway, much less shoot a white man. So they found him guilty as charged.

Willie had rather enjoyed his stay in jail. Two or three times his lawyer came and talked to him in a low voice and had him make his cross mark on many important-looking pieces of paper. It all gave him a feeling of importance hitherto not experienced.

He liked "Cap'm Archie," too—Cap'm Archie was always making jokes, and didn't make him do any work around the jail except a little sweeping. And during the long cool spring evenings, when the stars twinkled in the sky and the fiddling of the katydids out in the weed patch back of the jail floated in between the long iron-barred windows, Cap'm Archie would have one of the short-time prisoners drag his chair back to Willie's own private cage and Willie would sing for him.

Willie did like to sing—church songs, mostly. But sometimes when he felt sad and lonesome he'd sing the one that began:

> "Thirty days in jail,
> Baby, don't soun' so long,
> But de las' frien' I got in dis worl',
> Done shuck her laig an' gone."

There were many verses, and to these Willie had added a hundred others. He was good at that. When they locked up that Caldonie for cutting her husband because he stole one of her hens and a chicken brood and gave it to another woman, Willie celebrated the occasion by adding:

"He might er stole yo' chickens,
He might er stole yo' cow,
Hit don't make no diffunce what he stole,
You's in de jail-house now."

Cap'm Archie had laughed at that one and it made Willie happy.

Not long after that Cap'm Archie sent for him to come to the office. Cap'm Archie looked sad that day, and it made Willie feel sad. So when Cap'm Archie told him the Supreme Court had turned him down and that he would have to hang Willie was much relieved.

"Shuh! Cap'm Archie," Willie consoled, "dat ain' nothin' to go worryin' 'bout. I thought hit mought er been somethin' wrong, de way you had yo' face strung out. Shuh! Ain't dat de same as de judge done tole me?"

That afternoon Reverend Moore, Negro preacher, was ushered into Willie's cell, and under his exhortations Willie was converted. He had been converted annually ever since he could remember but he always had been too busy to follow it up. This time he had ample leisure in which to contemplate Christianity and draw mental pictures of it. Willie was keenly interested.

The preacher had spared no detail his imagination could supply as to the glories of heaven, and these Willie supplemented with the colourful pigments of his own imagination. Heaven was a wonderful place. Willie wanted to go there.

"Hyar dey comes, son," the preacher said kindly. "Git up off'n yo' knees."

Cap'm Archie unlocked the cage door with keys that rattled nervously in his hand. Behind the jailer were half a dozen others—the doctor, two brothers of the man he had killed, the editor of the *Wilton Parish Gazette*, and a short, stubby, mean-looking man that Willie disliked instinctively. He had never seen him before, and the pale-green, watery eyes that squinted out at him through shaggy eyelashes made Willie feel bad. "I loves him too," Willie insisted under his breath. "Got ter love him. 'Makes me love ev'ybody—hit's good ernuff fer me' "—Willie recalled the words from the old song. "An' I guess he is somebody. But I be dog ef'n he looks like much, Ole Green Eyes."

"Ready to go, Willie?" It was Cap'm Archie. His voice was kind and filled with sorrow. Willie hated to see Cap'm Archie like that. But when the jailer's teeth clicked together and he said briskly, "Here, slip your hands into these," it did not sound so sad, and Willie obeyed with alacrity.

"I bet you fergits my cigar, Cap'm Archie," Willie countered as his arms were being pinioned behind him.

"Cut out that damned foolishness! Come on here, nigger. I ain't got all day to fool." It was the stubby little man who assumed charge.

"Makes me love ev'ybody," Willie hummed desperately under his breath. "Hit's good ernuff fer me."

"Good ernuff fer anybody," seconded the preacher loudly, happy that he had found some place to enter into the ceremony with the dignity of his calling. "Hit's de ole time religion, and hit's good ernuff fer me!"

As the party marched up the narrow steps to the gallows, the Negro prisoners on the lower tier of cells caught

up the refrain and the brick walls of the little jail reverberated with:

"Gimme dat ole time religion,
Gimme dat ole time religion,
Gimme dat ole time religion, Lawd,
Hit's good ernuff fer me.

"Hit will take you home to Glory,
Hit will take you home to Glory,
Hit will take you home to Glory, Lawd,
Hit's good ernuff fer me."

The climb to the gallows took a remarkably short time and Willie noticed that as soon as they arrived there "Ole Green Eyes" rushed to the rope that was lying handy and began making a loop in the end of it.

"Makes me love ev'ybody," Willie insisted.

Everybody seemed nervous. Cap'm Archie couldn't look at him. The editor was talking with big words to the elder of the Gibbses and said something about "dancing on the air." Willie didn't understand it but he knew he wasn't going to dance on anything. Dancing would send him straight to hell. He had the preacher's word for it.

He edged over toward Cap'm Archie.

"When does I make my speech, Cap'm Archie?" he asked.

The jailer did not look up. "In a minute," he replied. "When you are ready to—when they stand you over there." He pointed to the trapdoor with his foot.

"Come over here, nigger." It was "Ole Green Eyes" again. Willie stood on the trapdoor.

"Makes me love ev'ybody," he kept repeating as the knot was being drawn close to his ear. "Makes me love ev'ybody."

When the knot was finished the little stubby man slipped a black hood over Willie's head and stepped back. A jaybird on a dead limb of the cottonwood broke out in a scathing chatter of malediction at the crow. A dog howled mournfully in the jail yard below. The katydids in the weed patch opened with a wild symphony of fiddling. "Somethin' 'bout to happen," Willie concluded. "I guess I better make my speech."

He threw back his shoulders and raised his chin as though about to address a large congregation.

"Folkses," he began in a clear, strong voice, "I has a few words I wants to say to y'all—"

"Too late now, nigger." It was that stubby little man. And even as the trap gave way under his feet Willie began:

"Makes me love ev'ybody."

Willie did not finish that line, however. He was interrupted in the midst of it by a long blast on a horn. It was a loud, thundering blast and it startled him. He looked into the direction from which it came and there, charging down the road, he saw four prancing horses drawing a snow-white chariot. It was a beautiful sight. He had seen some such rig the time when he went to the circus at Baton Rouge. But this rig was even prettier than the circus carriages. Big white plumes bobbed from the crown-pieces of the bridles, and the horses pranced and danced along, raising a terrible dust.

"Great day!" he exclaimed. "Class sho' is comin' down de road today."

In a minute the carriage was in front of him, and with much suddenness it came to a halt, the horses falling back on their haunches to check the momentum.

"Git up hyar, boy, an' le's git goin'," the driver called down. "Us is late, as it is—or else you is early."

Willie scrambled to the seat beside the driver. As the horses raced onward he enjoyed the thrill of the speedy ride, the wind rushing by his ears, the sparkle of the gold and silver harness, the dexterity with which the driver held the horses in the road with one hand and cracked the whip over their heads with the other.

"You drive right well, boy," he observed. "What's yo' name?"

"Jehu," replied the driver.

"Jehu-which?"

"Jest Jehu," replied the driver.

"Who dat boy wid de hawn in his han'?"

"Gab'l."

The monosyllabic replies of his companion irritated Willie. He wanted conversation and he intended to have it.

"How long you been—" he began, but suddenly Gabriel raised his trumpet to his lips and blew a deafening blast which almost lifted Willie from his seat.

"Hol' tight," cautioned Jehu, and the chariot stopped suddenly.

Willie saw an old man in a black slouch hat and cutaway coat, walking very alertly toward the carriage. His face was cleanly shaven except for a moustache and goatee which gave him a distinguished appearance. Willie instinctively knew that this quality-gentleman was going to ride on the plush seats inside, so he leaped down and opened the door of the carriage. The old man halted a few paces from him and cast a surveying glance at the horses.

"That checkrein is too tight on that off-lead horse," he said. "It is a pity that I have to 'tend to these trifles, but damn it all, I can't stand to see fine horseflesh suffer on account of triflin' niggers."

Willie quickly ran and lowered the checkrein and climbed back to his seat.

"You oughter know better'n to check up dat hoss so high," he admonished Jehu with a proprietary air. "Us likes our hosses to have a heap er room."

Jehu did not reply. He held steadily to the reins, and the carriage fairly flew through the misty haze. Willie wanted to ask for the reins himself. He felt he could drive much more to his own satisfaction but, withal, he admitted, Jehu was doing very well. A minute later, however, when the lead horse bolted just as they approached a long bridge, and Jehu prevented a crash by expert manœuvring of the reins, Willie was glad he was not driving.

"Does dat ev'y time at the bridge," Jehu volunteered as the team settled down to a long gallop across the structure. "Lots er times us misses an' de folks in de chariot gits drownded tryin' to cross Jurdan."

"Dat de Jurdan, huh?" asked Willie. "I be dog," and he gripped tightly to the seat.

The chariot rolled off the bridge and up to the front of a white pearly gate where it stopped. Willie dropped confidently to the ground, opened the chariot door, and assisted the distinguished old passenger to alight. St. Peter swung the big gate open.

"Welcome, Colonel," he said. "It gives me great pleasure to greet you personally after having known you indirectly for these many years. She's waiting for you under the crêpe myrtles. Cherub, escort the Colonel to Miss Julia."

Willie thought that was great, and he was thrilled almost to ecstasy when the old gentleman gave him a curt nod in recognition of his service.

As soon as the old man had disappeared behind the cherub, St. Peter dropped his air of formality.

"Well, well," he said, "if it ain't that worthless Willie Malone. Willie, how'd you git here, son?"

That was language Willie could understand and appreciate.

"St. Peter," he replied, "I jes' got on de chariot an' rid up hyar."

"Well," said St. Peter, "I guess you better try on a pair of wings, then. Here, Cherub. Bring out a pair of wings for old Willie Malone."

St. Peter helped the cherub adjust the wings.

"Now you're fixed, son," he announced. "Fly away!"

And Willie flew. He flew among the golden clouds and down long narrow golden streets. He flew over mansions of gold and sparkling rivers. High into the air and close to the ground he flew. He tried a few fancy turns, such as he had seen birds perform among the chinaberry trees. He dived at the surface of the water and grabbed at the golden fish and then climbed again by lusty flaps of his wings, as pelicans do. And he did it perfectly.

"Doggone my hide," he exclaimed, "dis is somethin' like!"

After a few hours the novelty began to wear off. He was high in the air, maybe a mile high, he estimated. So he pointed one wing at an angle and began gliding down, making a huge spiral as he descended. Halfway down, he reversed the cant of his wings and came down the rest of the way, flying backwards.

He landed right in the midst of a group of other angels who were seated around the Great Throne. Upon the throne sat the Great Lord God. Willie recognized him instantly because of the distinction with which he sat upon his throne and by the carefree tilt of his huge, bejewelled crown almost hiding one eye and by the angle at which the ten-cent cigar was cocked. Willie was a little frightened, and dazzled by the regal splendour of it all, but he settled down noiselessly to the ground, and was made to

feel perfectly at home, by the informal greeting he received.

"I bet you want to hear some music, don't you, Willie?" asked the Great Lord God and, without waiting for Willie's reply, he continued, "Little David, play on your harp."

"What shall I play, Great Lord God?" asked Little David.

"Play something calm and low, Little David," said the Great Lord God. "Do not alarm my people."

David struck a chord or two on his harp. It was beautiful. The mellow music floated straight to Willie's heart. One or two of the other angels started humming with the music and, almost unconscious of where he was, Willie added his low, rich bass to the chorus:

"When dat big *Titanic* sunk down in de sea,
All de brass bands played 'Nearer My God to Thee.'
Out on de deep blue ocean de people sleep
In a cold wet cradle, three miles deep.
It's yo' las' trip, *Titanic*."

After several verses Willie began to feel a personal sorrow for the passengers of the *Titanic*. The music stopped suddenly, and the Great Lord God commanded, "Little David, play something quick and lively. Let the skies rock with mirth. Let the heavens open wide. Let the stars and the moon shine out. Let my people shout with joy."

And as soon as the command was issued all the angels began dancing and singing as Little David played:

"Two little babies a-layin' in de bed,
One of'm sick an' de yuther mos' dead.
Sont fer de doctor an' de doctor said,
'Give dem babies some shortnin' bread.'

So put on de skillet an' throw way de led,
Cause mammy gonter make a little shortnin' bread."

Several more songs followed and finally Willie began to tire of singing. The party broke up, the angels flying away in groups of twos and threes. Soon no one was left before the throne except Willie.

Willie felt slightly embarrassed there, with no one around except the Great Lord God. He figured he might be intruding or something, or that perhaps he'd better go out and fly some more. But as he was turning over the idea a tall, kindly-looking angel, more strikingly handsome than any he had ever seen, strolled up and sat down familiarly by the side of the Great Lord God. At first Willie thought it was Cap'm Archie. There was kindness and understanding in his face, just like Cap'm Archie's face. But it wasn't Cap'm Archie. Cap'm Archie had no scars on his hands and feet as had this angel.

As he puzzled over the matter he faintly remembered a story his old mammy had told him about a man with scars on his hands and feet, and he recalled the lines of a song that Cap'm Archie used to make him sing:

"They nailed His hands and they rivet His feet,
An' de hammers wuz heard in Jerusalem street."

Some way, Willie could not place him. But he felt much more at ease for his presence.

"What you thinking about, Willie?" the kindly angel asked. "You don't seem to be enjoying yourself so much."

Willie did not know exactly what to reply. He rummaged through his mind hastily. He had been entirely happy for ever so long, not a thing had gone wrong. Everybody had been so nice to him. The music had been beautiful and just the songs he liked to sing. His wings

fitted perfectly and St. Peter had been wonderful. So had Jehu. And Cap'm Archie—he had given him everything he could think of and a heap he did not think of. Of course there was the matter of the cigar. He wanted to go to the gallows with a cigar in his mouth. But that wasn't Cap'm Archie's fault . . . and, too, maybe Cap'm Archie had forgotten the cigar. He had so many things to think about. Willie concluded that if it were the cigar he would say nothing about it to the kind angel because he did not want to embarrass Cap'm Archie. He did not really want to go to the gallows with a cigar, anyway, he decided.

"But I did want ter make dat speech," he concluded.

"What speech is that?" asked the kindly-faced angel.

Willie explained in great detail, and the angel and the Great Lord God listened intently.

"But hit wa'n't Cap'm Archie's fault," he declared.

"Whose fault was it, then?" demanded the Great Lord God.

"Hit mought er been—onderstan', I ain' s'cusin' nobody," Willie faltered, "but hit mought er been Ole Green Eyes. But I loves ev'ybody—him, too," he added hastily.

"I know the scoundrel," declared the Great Lord God. "He's been plaguing me for years and years. But this is too much." The brow of the Great Lord God clouded in anger and he shouted with a terrible roar, like seven peals of thunder, "Cherub, bring me a bolt of forked lightning that I may strike that man from the face of the earth."

The cherub brought the lightning, and the Great Lord God was about to hurl it. But the kind angel touched his arm gently.

"I wouldn't, Father," said the angel. "He might not have understood that the speech was to have been the biggest thing in Willie's life."

The Great Lord God stayed his hand and turned upon

the kind angel. "Of course he understood. That's why he didn't let him make it. He's just low-down mean. I've put up with enough of it."

"But," insisted the kind angel, "it will do no good to strike him down with lightning. It would frighten many people. And it would start new arguments over religion and that would lead to controversies and they would lead to hatreds and hatreds lead to—"

"I've heard that speech a million times, Son," said the Great Lord God, "and you needn't go into details. I admit you are right," and he handed the lightning bolt back to the cherub. "But," continued the Great Lord God, "I will not let this thing pass." His brow clouded in anger again. "I am the Great I Am," he roared, "and my commands shall be obeyed." The kind angel sat meekly and argued no further.

"Willie Malone," commanded the Great Lord God in a tone of thunder.

"Yassuh, Great Lord God," replied Willie, jumping to his feet.

"You go right back down yonder and make that speech. He's sitting in the jail office right now with Captain Archie. Now go and do my commands."

Willie lost no time in getting to the jail. As he approached, he noticed a half-dozen Negroes—friends of his—standing in the rain about the big steel door entry to the lower cells. But he hurried by them with only a curt "hy-dy, boys." The fact that they ignored him stung a little but he had no time to lose. He went straight to the office entrance.

The green-eyed man was seated at a table fingering five new ten-dollar bills. The coroner was scratching away with a pen on a big official-looking document. The editor and

the two Gibbses were talking in low tones. Cap'm Archie was hunched down in his chair at his desk, looking at the floor. Willie stood a minute respectfully, hoping Cap'm Archie would notice him and inquire what he wanted.

But Cap'm Archie did not look toward him and Willie tried a scheme that had worked many times for him.

"Cap'm, suh," he said, "don' you want dis ole dirty flo' swep' up er somethin'?"

But Cap'm Archie acted as though he did not hear.

Willie cogitated. Maybe he was worrying about forgetting the cigar.

But as the thought came to Willie Cap'm Archie slowly reached to his vest pocket and drew out a single long black cigar and studied it intently.

"You got the mate to that'n, Sheriff?" Ole Green Eyes quit shuffling the new bills and directed his attention toward the cigar.

"Nope," replied Cap'm Archie, "I ain't got the mate to this'n." And he tightened his grip on the cigar until he had broken and crushed it. "And if I did have it," he added, "I'd damn well keep it."

"No hard feelings, Sheriff," offered Green Eyes. "I see you ain't used to it. Cheer up. It's just another nigger less."

A scraping of feet in the jail hall at the side of the office attracted the attention of both Cap'm Archie and Green Eyes. Willie followed their gaze through the barred hall door and saw six Negroes carrying a long black box toward the big jail door. Behind the box marched Preacher Moore, directing and exhorting as he went.

"There he goes now—out of yer jail and out of yer life. It's all over and yer duty's done."

Cap'm Archie squeezed the cigar tightly, crumbling it into tiny bits.

The green-eyed man essayed a cackling laugh. "And so's mine," he continued, picking up the five bills, "so I guess I'll be going."

Willie had been standing by in respectful silence since the white folks had indicated by ignoring him that they were too busy to talk to him. White people are that way, Willie had learned. Sometimes they will talk with you and laugh with you. And sometimes when they are busy they won't pay any attention to you unless you get in their way or something. Then they will curse you. Willie knew how to get along with white folks.

But things were different now. He had business with Mister Green Eyes.

"Wait a minute, Cap'm, suh," he addressed the green-eyed man.

Green Eyes stiffened, blinked his eyes, passed his hand across his forehead, and frowned. He stuck the money into his pocket quickly and grabbed for his hat.

"Wait a minute, Cap'm," Willie pleaded. "I got ter make my speech."

The green-eyed man turned pale and shut his eyes tightly, gritting his teeth and shaking his head as if in an effort to clear his brain.

"Sheriff," he said with a great struggle for calmness in his voice, "I need a drink. I—I—I'm sort of nervous, I reckon."

"There's the doctor," Cap'm Archie replied calmly, nodding toward the coroner.

"But, Cap'm, suh, wait," interjected Willie, "lemme make my speech—"

The green-eyed man yelled and ran to the doctor.

"Get me a drink, Doctor!" he begged. "A drink! For God's sake. I'm all shot to hell, Doctor. Get me a drink, quick."

"What's the matter, man?" demanded the doctor. "What is it?"

"That damned nigger, Doctor. I'm seein' things. So help me. He wants to make a speech, Doctor—"

"Dat's all right, Cap'm," Willie insisted. "Hit ain't no mean speech."

"O-w-w-w-w—Doctor," screamed the green-eyed man. "There he is again."

The coroner and Cap'm Archie caught the hangman and led him to a chair.

"Calm down, man," said the doctor. "Your nerves are upset."

"But that nigger, that damned nigger! I see him."

"Well, he isn't going to hurt you, man. He's—"

"Nawsuh, I wa'n't gonter hurt nobody," Willie assured him. "I jes' was gonter say a few words."

The man struggled wildly, and it was only with the added strength of the two Gibbses and the editor that they succeeded in holding him in his chair. He was alternately crying and cursing, trembling weakly and fighting wildly.

"That damned nigger! I see him! I see him!" he kept shouting. "He wants to make a speech!"

"Hold him until I can fix a hypodermic," ordered the doctor.

"I jes' gonter make my speech," Willie pleaded again in an effort to calm the green-eyed man. "I ain't gonter do nothin' but jes' tawk."

But instead of being soothed, the man became more violent and but for the utmost strength of four men, he would have escaped. They held him, though. Held him in the chair while his eyes glared in wild frenzy, his huge neck swelled even bigger, his face turned purple, and his breath came in short rasping gasps. "Git away, damned nigger. I see you. Ow-ww-ww!"

"I jes' on'y got a few words I wanner say," Willie began again. And after one lunge at the sound of Willie's voice the man quieted down, and his eyes stared glassily at nothing, although his neck still bulged. The colour of his face changed to an ugly blue and his mouth dropped open and dripped frothy saliva. And while the green-eyed man sat limp in the chair Willie Malone completed his speech:

"I jes' wanner say I ain't got no hard feelin's agin nobody an' I don' want nobody to has no hard feelin's agin me. An' I wants to meet you all in heaven."

A BROWN WOMAN [1]

by JAMES BRANCH CABELL

JAMES BRANCH CABELL was born in Virginia in 1879. He was instructor in French and Greek at William and Mary College, 1896-97, graduating with the degree of B.A. in 1898. For a time he engaged in newspaper work and interested himself in genealogical research. His fiction is notable for both its style and subject-matter, the scene of his novels being an imaginary medieval country called Poictesme. Naturally there are many romantic elements in his work. Several of his best books are *Jurgen, The Cream of the Jest, Beyond Life,* and *The Certain Hour.*

"But I must be hurrying home now," the girl said, "for it is high time I were back in the hayfields."

"Fair shepherdess," he implored, "for heaven's sake, let us not cut short the pastorelle thus abruptly."

"And what manner of beast may that be, pray?"

"'Tis a conventional form of verse, my dear, which we at present strikingly illustrate. The plan of a pastorelle is simplicity's self: a gentleman, which I may fairly claim to be, in some fair rural scene—such as this,—comes suddenly upon a rustic maiden of surpassing beauty. He naturally falls in love with her, and they say all manner of fine things to each other."

She considered him for a while before speaking. It thrilled him to see the odd tenderness that was in her face.

"You always think of saying and writing fine things, do you not, sir?"

[1] From *The Certain Hour,* Storisende Edition, by James Branch Cabell. Copyright by Robert M. McBride & Co. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

"My dear," he answered, gravely, "I believe that I was undoubtedly guilty of such folly until you came. I wish I could make you understand how your coming has changed everything."

"You can tell me some other time," the girl gaily declared, and was about to leave him.

His hand detained her, very gently. "Faith, but I fear not, for already my old hallucinations seem to me incredible. Why, yesterday I thought it the most desirable of human lots to be a great poet,"—the gentleman laughed in self-mockery. "I positively did. I labored every day toward becoming one. I lived among books, esteemed that I was doing something of genuine importance as I gravely tinkered with alliteration and metaphor and antithesis and judicious paraphrases of the ancients. I put up with life solely because it afforded material for versification; and, in reality, believed the destruction of Troy was providentially ordained lest Homer lack subject matter for an epic. And as for loving, I thought people fell in love in order to exchange witty rhymes."

His hand detained her, very gently. . . . Indeed, it seemed to him he could never tire of noting her excellencies. Perhaps it was that splendid light poise of her head he chiefly loved; he thought so, at least, just now. Or was it the wonder of her walk, which made all other women he had ever known appear to mince and hobble, like rusty toys? Something there was assuredly about this slim brown girl which recalled an untamed and harmless woodland creature. Perhaps it was her kind, bright, beautifully stupid eyes, which seemed to mirror the large tranquillity of forests. . . .

"You gentry are always talking of love," she marveled.

"Oh," he said, with acerbity, "oh, I don't doubt that

any number of beef-gorging squires and leering, long-legged Oxford dandies—"

He broke off here, and laughed contemptuously, "Well, you are a bouncing, brightly colored, fine armful of flesh, and they have eyes as keen as mine. And I do not blame you, my dear, for believing my designs to be no more commendable than theirs,—no, not at all."

But his mood was spoiled, and his tetchy vanity was hurt, by the thought of stout well-set fellows having wooed this girl; and he permitted her to go.

Yet he sat alone for a while upon the fallen tree-trunk, humming a contented little tune. Never in his life had he been happier. He did not venture to suppose that any creature so adorable could love such a sickly hunchback, such a small gargoyle of a man, as he was; but that Sarah was fond of him, he knew. There would be no trouble in arranging with her father for their marriage, most certainly; and he meant to attend to that matter this very morning, and within ten minutes. So Mr. Alexander Pope was meanwhile arranging in his mind a suitable wording for his announcement of marital aspirations.

Thus John Gay found him presently, and roused him from phrase-spinning. "And what shall we do this morning, Alexander?" Gay was always demanding, like a spoiled child, to be amused.

Pope told him what his own plans were, speaking quite simply, but with his countenance radiant. Gay took off his hat and wiped his forehead, for the day was warm. He did not say anything at all.

"Well—?" Mr. Pope asked, after a pause.

Mr. Gay was dubious. "I had never thought that you would marry," he said. "And—why, hang it, Alexander! to grow enamored of a milkmaid is well enough for the

hero of a poem, but in a poet it hints at injudicious composition."

Mr. Pope gesticulated with thin hands and seemed upon the verge of eloquence. Then he spoke unanswerably.

"But I love her," he said.

John Gay's reply was a subdued whistle. He, in common with the other guests of Lord Harcourt, at Nuneham Courtney, had wondered what would be the outcome of Mr. Alexander Pope's intimacy with Sarah Drew. A month earlier the poet had sprained his ankle upon Amshot Heath, and this young woman had found him lying there, entirely helpless, as she returned from her evening milking. Being hale of person, she had managed to get the little hunchback to her home unaided. And since then Pope had often been seen with her.

This much was common knowledge. That Mr. Pope proposed to marry the heroine of his misadventure afforded a fair mark for raillery, no doubt, but Gay, in common with the run of educated England in 1718, did not aspire to be facetious at Pope's expense. The luxury was too costly. Offend the dwarf in any fashion, and were you the proudest duke at court or the most inconsiderable rhymester in Petticoat Lane, it made no difference; there was no crime too heinous for "the great Mr. Pope's" next verses to charge you with, and, worst of all, there was no misdoing so out of character that his adroit malignancy could not make it seem plausible.

Now, after another pause, Pope said: "I must be going now. Will you not wish me luck?"

"Why, Alexander—why, hang it!" was Mr. Gay's observation, "I believe that you are human after all, and not just a book in breeches."

He thereby voiced a commentary patently uncalled for, as Mr. Pope afterward reflected. Mr. Pope was then tread-

ing toward the home of old Frederick Drew. It was a gray morning in late July.

"I love her," Pope had said. The fact was undeniable; yet an expression of it necessarily halts. Pope knew, as every man must do who dares conserve his energies to annotate the drama of life rather than play a part in it, the nature of that loneliness which this conservation breeds. Such persons may hope to win a posthumous esteem in the library, but it is at the bleak cost of making life a wistful transaction with foreigners. In such enforced aloofness Sarah Drew had come to him,—strong, beautiful, young, good and vital, all that he was not,—and had serenely befriended "the great Mr. Pope," whom she viewed as a queer decrepit little gentleman of whom within a week she appeared unfeignedly fond.

"I love her," Pope had said. Eh, yes, no doubt; and what, he fiercely demanded of himself, was he—a crippled scribbler, a bungling artisan of phrases,—that he should dare to love this splendid and deep-bosomed goddess? Something of youth awoke, possessing him,—something of that high ardor which, as he cloudily remembered now, had once controlled a boy who dreamed in Windsor Forest and with the lightest of hearts planned to achieve the impossible. For what was more difficult of attainment than to achieve the perfected phrase, so worded that to alter a syllable of its wording would be little short of sacrilege?

"What whimwhams!" decreed the great Mr. Pope, aloud. "Verse-making is at best only the affair of idle men who write in their closets and of idle men who read there. And as for him who polishes phrases, whatever be his fate in poetry, it is ten to one but he must give up all the reasonable aims of life for it."

No, he would have no more of loneliness. Henceforward Alexander Pope would be human,—like the others. To

write perfectly was much; but it was not everything. Living was capable of furnishing even more than the raw material of a couplet. It might, for instance, yield contentment.

For instance, if you loved, and married, and begot, and died, with the seriousness of a person who believes he is performing an action of real importance, and conceded that the perfection of any art, whether it be that of verse-making or of rope-dancing, is at best a by-product of life's conduct; then, at worst, you probably would not be lonely. No; you would be at one with all other fat-witted people, and there was no greater blessing conceivable.

Pope muttered, and produced his notebook, and wrote tentatively.

Wrote Mr. Pope:

> The bliss of man (could pride that blessing find)
> Is not to act or think beyond mankind;
> No powers of body or of soul to share
> But what his nature and his state can bear.

"His state!" yes, undeniably, two sibilants collided there. "His wit?"—no, that would be flat-footed awkwardness in the management of your vowel-sounds; the lengthened "a" was almost requisite. . . . Pope was fretting over the imbroglio when he absent-mindedly glanced up to perceive that his Sarah, in the while that he made rhymes, was being embraced by a stalwart and florid young male animal. . . . Mr. Pope perfectly recognized the creature. It was a John Hughes, one of Lord Harcourt's tenant farmers. . . .

The dwarf gave a hard, wringing motion of his hands. The diamond—Lord Bolingbroke's gift—which ornamented Pope's left hand cut into the flesh of his little finger, so cruel was the gesture; and this little finger was

bleeding as Pope tripped forward, smiling. A gentleman does not incommode the public by displaying the ugliness of a personal wound.

"Do I intrude?" he queried. "Ah, well! I have also dwelt in Arcadia." It was bitter to comprehend that he had never done so.

The lovers were visibly annoyed; yet, if an interruption of their pleasant commerce was decreed to be, it could not possibly have sprung, as they soon found, from a more sympathetic source.

These were not subtle persons. Pope had the truth from them within ten minutes. They loved each other; but John Hughes was penniless, and old Frederick Drew was, in consequence, obdurate.

"And, besides, he thinks you mean to marry her!" said John Hughes.

"The gray yeoman is ambitious," replied Mr. Pope. "He forgets that in common reason the utmost reach of my designs would be to have his daughter as my kept mistress for a month or two. As concerns yourself, my good fellow, the case is somewhat different. Why, it is a veritable romance,—an affair of Daphne and Corydon—"

The dwarf went toward Sarah Drew. The chary sunlight had found the gold in her hair, and its glint was brightly visible to him.

"My dear—" he said. His thin, long fingers touched her capable hand. It was a sort of caress—half-timid. "My dear, I owe my life to you. My body is at most a flimsy abortion such as a night's exposure would have made more tranquil than it is just now. Yes, it was you who found a caricature of the sort of man that Master Hughes here is, disabled, helpless, and—for reasons which doubtless seemed to you sufficient,—contrived that this unsightly parody continue in existence. I am not lovable, my dear.

I am only a hunchback, as you can see. I go among mankind like an ill-natured burlesque of Heaven's handiwork—"

His finger-tips touched the back of her hand again. "I think there was never a maker of enduring verse who did not at one period or another long to exchange an assured immortality for a sturdier pair of shoulders. I think—I think that I am prone to speak at random," Pope said, with his half-drowsy smile. "Yet, none the less, an honest man, as our kinsmen in Adam average, is bound to pay his equitable debts."

She said, "I do not understand."

"I have perpetrated certain jingles," Pope returned. "I had not comprehended until today they are the only children I shall leave behind me. Eh, and what would you make of them, my dear, could ingenuity contrive a torture dire enough to force you into reading them! . . . Misguided people have paid me for contriving these jingles. So that I have money enough to buy you from your father just as I could purchase one of his heifers. Yes, at the very least I have money, and I have earned it. I will send your big-thewed adorer—I believe that Hughes is the name?—£500 of it this afternoon. That sum, I gather, will be sufficient to remove your father's objection to your marriage with Master Hughes."

Pope could not but admire himself tremendously. Moreover, in such matters no woman is blind. Tears had come into Sarah's huge brown eyes. This tender-hearted girl was not thinking of John Hughes now. Pope noted the fact, and noted also the circumstance that these unshed tears lent to her eyes the bulging appearance which he had observed in the eyes of women afflicted with goitre.

"Sir,—you are good," said Sarah Drew.

"No adjective, my dear, was ever applied with less dis-

crimination. It is merely that you have rendered no inconsiderable service to posterity, and merit a reward."

"Oh, and indeed, indeed, I was always fond of you—" The girl half-sobbed this.

She would have added more, no doubt, since compassion is garrulous, had not Pope's lean, scratched hand dismissed a display of emotion as not entirely in consonance with the rules of the game.

"My dear, therein you have signally honored me. There remains only to offer you my appreciation of your benevolence toward a sickly monster, and to entreat for my late intrusion—howsoever unintentional—that forgiveness which you would not deny, I think, to any other impertinent insect."

"Oh, but we have no words to thank you, sir—!" Thus Hughes began.

"Then don't attempt it, my good fellow. For phrase-spinning, as I can assure you, is the most profitless of all pursuits."

Whereupon Pope bowed low, wheeled, walked away. Yes, he was wounded past sufferance; it seemed to him he must die of it. Life was a farce, and Destiny an overseer who hiccoughed mandates. Well, all that Destiny could find to gloat over, he reflected, was the tranquil figure of a smallish gentleman switching at the grass-blades with his cane as he sauntered debonairly under darkening skies.

For a storm was coming on, and the first big drops of it were splattering the terrace when Mr. Pope entered Lord Harcourt's mansion.

Pope went straight to his own rooms. As he came in there was a vivid flash of lightning, followed instantaneously by a crashing, splitting noise, like that of uni-

verses ripped asunder. He did not honor the high uproar with attention. This dwarf was not afraid of anything except the commission of an error in taste.

Then, too, there were letters for him, laid ready on the writing-table. Nothing of much importance he found there.—Here, though, was a rather diverting letter from Eustace Budgell, that poor fool, abjectly thanking Mr. Pope for his advice concerning how best to answer the atrocious calumnies on Budgell then appearing in *The Grub-Street Journal*,—and reposing, drolly enough, upon the proof-sheets of an anonymous letter which Pope had prepared for the next issue of that publication, wherein he sprightly told how Budgell had poisoned Dr. Tindal, after forging his will. For even if Budgell had not in point of fact been guilty of these particular peccadillos, he had quite certainly committed the crime of speaking lightly of Mr. Pope, as "a little envious animal," some seven years ago; and it was for this grave indiscretion that Pope was dexterously goading the man into insanity, and eventually drove him to suicide. . . .

The storm made the room dark and reading difficult. Still, this was an even more amusing letter, from the all-powerful Duchess of Marlborough. In as civil terms as her sick rage could muster, the frightened woman offered Mr. Pope £1,000 to suppress his verbal portrait of her, in the character of Atossa, from his *Moral Essays;* and Pope straightway decided to accept the bribe, and afterward to print his verses unchanged. For the hag, as he reflected, very greatly needed to be taught that in this world there was at least one person who did not quail before her tantrums. There would be, moreover, even an elementary justice in thus robbing her who had robbed England at large. And, besides, her name was Sarah. . . .

Pope lighted four candles and set them before the long

French mirror. He stood appraising his many curious deformities while the storm raged. He stood sidelong, peering over his left shoulder, in order to see the outline of his crooked back. Nowhere in England, he reflected, was there a person more pitiable and more repellent outwardly.

"And, oh, it would be droll," Pope said, aloud, "if our exteriors were ever altogether parodies. But time keeps a diary in our faces, and writes a monstrously plain hand. Now, if you take the first letter of Mr. Alexander Pope's Christian name, and the first and last letters of his surname, you have A. P. E.," Pope quoted genially. "I begin to think that Dennis was right. What conceivable woman would not prefer a well-set man of five-and-twenty to such a withered abortion? And what does it matter, after all, that a hunchback has dared to desire a shapely brown-haired woman?"

Another peal of thunder bellowed. The storm was growing furious.

"Yet I have had a marvelous dream. Now I awaken. I must go on in the old round. As long as my wits preserve their agility I must be able to amuse, to flatter and, at need, to intimidate the patrons of that ape in the mirror, so that they will not dare refuse me the market-value of my antics. And Sarah Drew has declined an alliance such as this in favor of a fresh-colored complexion and a pair of straight shoulders!"

Pope thought a while. "She chose wisely. She bargained royally, giving love for no whit less than love. The man is rustic, illiterate; he never heard of Aristotle, he would be at a loss to distinguish between a trochee and a Titian, and if you mentioned Boileau to him he would probably imagine you were talking of cookery. But he loves her. He would forfeit eternity to save her a toothache. And, chief of all, she can make this robust baby happy, and she

alone can make him happy. And so, she gives, gives royally—"

Sullen rain was battering at the window. "And you—you hunchback in the mirror, you maker of neat rhymes,—pray, what had you to offer? A coach-and-six, of course, and pin-money and furbelows and in the end a mausoleum with unimpeachable Latin on it! And—*paté sur paté*—an unswerving devotion which she would share on almost equal terms with the Collected Works of Alexander Pope. And so she chose this very large and brightly colored young male animal."

The dwarf turned, staggered, fell upon his bed. "God, make a man of me, make me more nearly human. I loved her,—such as I am, You know that I loved her! You know that I desire her happiness above all things. Ah, no, for You know that I do not, at bottom. I want to hurt, to wound all living creatures, because they know how to be happy, and I do not know how. But why did You decree that I should never be an obtuse and comely animal such as this John Hughes is? I am so tired of being 'the great Mr. Pope,' and I want only the common joys of life."

The hunchback wept. It would be too curious to anatomize the writhings of his proud small soul.

Now some one tapped upon the door. It was John Gay. He was bidden to enter; and, complying, found Mr. Pope yawning over the latest of Tonson's publications.

Gay's face was singularly portentous. "My friend," Gay blurted out, "I bring news which will horrify you. Believe me, I would never have mustered the pluck to bring it did I not love you. I cannot let you hear it first in public and unprepared, as, otherwise, you would have to do."

"Do I not know you have the kindest heart in all the

world? Why, so outrageous are your amiable defects that they would be the public derision of your enemies if you had any," Pope returned.

The other poet evinced an awkward comminglement of consternation and pity. "It appears that when this storm arose—why, Mistress Drew was with a young man of the neighborhood,—a John Hewet—" Gay was speaking with unaccustomed rapidity.

"Hughes, I think," Pope interrupted, equably.

"Perhaps—I am not sure. They sought shelter under a haycock. You will remember that first crash of thunder, as if the heavens were in demolishment? My friend, the reapers who had been laboring in the fields—who had been driven to such protection as the trees or hedges afforded—"

"Get on!" a shrill voice cried; "for God's love, man, get on!"

Pope had risen. This pallid, shaken wisp was not in appearance the great Mr. Pope whose ingenuity had enabled Homeric warriors to excel in the genteel.

"They first saw a little smoke. . . . They found this Hughes with one arm about the neck of Mistress Drew, and the other held over her face, as if to screen her from the lightning. They were both"—and here Gay hesitated. "They were both dead," he amended.

Pope turned abruptly. Nakedness is of necessity uncouth, he held, whether it be the body or the soul that is unveiled. Mr. Pope went toward a window which he opened, and he stood thus looking out for a brief while.

"So she is dead," he said. "It is very strange. So many rare felicities of shape and color, so much of purity and kindliness and valor and mirth, extinguished as one snuffs a candle! Well! I am sorry she is dead, for the child had

a talent for living and got such joy out of it. . . . Hers was a lovely, happy life, but it was sterile. Already nothing remains of her but dead flesh which must be huddled out of sight. I shall not perish thus entirely, I believe. Men will remember me. Truly a mighty foundation for pride! when the utmost I can hope for is but to be read in one island, and to be thrown aside at the end of one age. Indeed, I am not even sure of that much. I print, and print, and print. And when I collect my verses into books, I am altogether uncertain whether to look upon myself as a man building a monument, or burying the dead. It sometimes seems to me that each publication is but a solemn funeral of many wasted years. For I have given all to the verse-making. Granted that the sacrifice avails to rescue my name from oblivion, what will it profit me when I am dead and care no more for men's opinions than Sarah Drew cares now for what I say of her? But then she never cared. She loved John Hughes. And she was right."

He made an end of speaking, still peering out of the window with considerate narrowed eyes.

The storm was over. In the beech-tree opposite a wren was raising optimistic outcry. The sun had won his way through a black-bellied shred of cloud; upon the terrace below, a dripping Venus and a Perseus were glistening as with white fire. Past these, drenched gardens, the natural wildness of which was judiciously restrained with walks, ponds, grottoes, statuary and other rural elegancies, displayed the intermingled glows of diamonds and emeralds, and glittered as if with pearls and rubies where tempest-battered roses were reviving in assertiveness.

"I think the storm is over," Mr. Pope remarked. "It is strange how violent are these convulsions of nature. . . . But nature is a treacherous blowsy jade, who respects

nobody. A gentleman can but shrug under her onslaughts, and henceforward civilly avoid them. It is a consolation to reflect that they pass quickly."

He turned as if in defiance. "Yes, yes! It hurts. But I envy them. Yes, even I, that ugly spiteful hornet of a man! 'the great Mr. Pope,' who will be dining with the proudest people in England within the hour and gloating over their deference! For they presume to make a little free with God occasionally, John, but never with me. And I envy these dead young fools. . . . You see, they loved each other, John. I left them, not an hour ago, the happiest of living creatures. I looked back once. I pretended to have dropped my handkerchief. I imagine they were talking of their wedding-clothes, for this broad-shouldered Hughes was matching poppies and field-flowers to her complexion. It was a scene out of Theocritus. I think Heaven was so well pleased by the tableau that Heaven hastily resumed possession of its enactors in order to prevent any after-happenings from belittling that perfect instant."

"Egad, and matrimony might easily have proved an anticlimax," Gay considered.

"Yes; oh, it is only Love that is blind, and not the lover necessarily. I know. I suppose I always knew at the bottom of my heart. This hamadryad was destined in the outcome to dwindle into a village housewife, she would have taken a lively interest in the number of eggs the hens were laying, she would even have assured her children, precisely in the way her father spoke of John Hughes, that young people ordinarily have foolish fancies which their rational elders agree to disregard. But as it is, no Eastern queen—not Semele herself,—left earth more nobly—"

Pope broke off short. He produced his notebook, which

he never went without, and he wrote frowningly, with many erasures.

"H'm, yes," he said; and he read aloud:

"When Eastern lovers feed the funeral fire,
On the same pile the faithful fair expire;
Here pitying heaven that virtue mutual found,
And blasted both that it might neither wound.
Hearts so sincere the Almighty saw well pleased,
Sent His own lightning and the victims seized."

Then Pope made a grimace. "No; the analogy is trim enough, but the lines lack fervor. It is deplorable how much easier it is to express any emotion other than that of which one is actually conscious."

Pope had torn the paper half through before he reflected that it would help to fill a printed page. He put it in his pocket. He said reflectively:

"But, come now, John, I am writing to Lady Mary this afternoon. You know how she loves oddities. Between us—with prose as the medium, of course, since verse should, after all, confine itself to the commemoration of heroes and royal persons,—I believe we might make of this quite picturesque occurrence a neat and moving pastorelle—I should say, pastoral, of course, but my wits are wool-gathering."

Mr. Gay had the kindest heart in the universe. Yet he, also, had dreamed of the perfected phrase, so worded that to alter a syllable of its wording would be little short of sacrilege. Eyes kindling, he took up a pen, and Gay cried out:

"Yes, yes, I understand. Egad, it is an admirable and quaint and most engaging theme. But, then, I don't believe I ever saw these lovers—?"

"John was a well-set man of about five-and-twenty,"

replied Mr. Pope; "and Sarah was a brown woman of some eighteen years, three months and fourteen days."

Then these two dipped their pens and set about a moving composition, which has today its proper rating among Mr. Pope's Complete Works.

PAUL'S CASE [1]

by WILLA CATHER

(1876-1947)

WILLA CATHER was born in Virginia in 1876. When she was nine years old her parents moved to Nebraska. At the age of nineteen she graduated from the state university there, becoming in turn a newspaper worker, teacher, managing editor and writer. Speaking of her own writing, she says: "What I always want to do is to make the writing count for less and less and the people for more and more. I'd like the writing to be so lost in the object that it doesn't exist for the reader." Among her many excellent books are *My Antonia, The Song of the Lark,* and *O Pioneers!,* novels; and *Youth and the Bright Medusa,* short stories.

IT WAS Paul's afternoon to appear before the faculty of the Pittsburgh High School to account for his various misdemeanors. He had been suspended a week ago, and his father had called at the Principal's office and confessed his perplexity about his son. Paul entered the faculty room suave and smiling. His clothes were a trifle outgrown, and the tan velvet on the collar of his open overcoat was frayed and worn; but for all that there was something of the dandy about him, and he wore an opal pin in his neatly knotted black four-in-hand, and a red carnation in his buttonhole. This latter adornment the faculty somehow felt was not properly significant of the contrite spirit befitting a boy under the ban of suspension.

Paul was tall for his age and very thin, with high,

[1] Reprinted from *Youth and the Bright Medusa* by Willa Cather, by and with permission of and special arrangement with Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., authorized publishers.

cramped shoulders and a narrow chest. His eyes were remarkable for a certain hysterical brilliancy, and he continually used them in a conscious, theatrical sort of way, peculiarly offensive in a boy. The pupils were abnormally large, as though he were addicted to belladonna, but there was a glassy glitter about them which that drug does not produce.

When questioned by the Principal as to why he was there, Paul stated, politely enough, that he wanted to come back to school. This was a lie, but Paul was quite accustomed to lying; found it, indeed, indispensable for overcoming friction. His teachers were asked to state their respective charges against him, which they did with such a rancour and aggrievedness as evinced that this was not a usual case. Disorder and impertinence were among the offenses named, yet each of his instructors felt that it was scarcely possible to put into words the real cause of the trouble, which lay in a sort of hysterically defiant manner of the boy's; in the contempt which they all knew he felt for them, and which he seemingly made not the least effort to conceal. Once, when he had been making a synopsis of a paragraph at the blackboard, his English teacher had stepped to his side and attempted to guide his hand. Paul had started back with a shudder and thrust his hands violently behind him. The astonished woman could scarcely have been more hurt and embarrassed had he struck at her. The insult was so involuntary and definitely personal as to be unforgettable. In one way and another, he had made all his teachers, men and women alike, conscious of the same feeling of physical aversion. In one class he habitually sat with his hand shading his eyes; in another he always looked out of the window during the recitation; in another he made a running commentary on the lecture, with humorous intent.

His teachers felt this afternoon that his whole attitude was symbolized by his shrug and his flippantly red carnation flower, and they fell upon him without mercy, his English teacher leading the pack. He stood through it smiling, his pale lips parted over his white teeth. (His lips were continually twitching, and he had a habit of raising his eyebrows that was contemptuous and irritating to the last degree.) Older boys than Paul had broken down and shed tears under that ordeal, but his set smile did not once desert him, and his only sign of discomfort was the nervous trembling of the fingers that toyed with the buttons of his overcoat, and an occasional jerking of the other hand which held his hat. Paul was always smiling, always glancing about him, seeming to feel that people might be watching him and trying to detect something. This conscious expression, since it was as far as possible from boyish mirthfulness, was usually attributed to insolence or "smartness."

As the inquisition proceeded, one of his instructors repeated an impertinent remark of the boy's, and the Principal asked him whether he thought that a courteous speech to make to a woman. Paul shrugged his shoulders slightly and his eyebrows twitched.

"I don't know," he replied. "I didn't mean to be polite or impolite, either. I guess it's a sort of way I have of saying things regardless."

The Principal asked him whether he didn't think that a way it would be well to get rid of. Paul grinned and said he guessed so. When he was told that he could go, he bowed gracefully and went out. His bow was like a repetition of the scandalous red carnation.

His teachers were in despair, and his drawing master voiced the feeling of them all when he declared there was something about the boy which none of them understood.

He added: "I don't really believe that smile of his comes altogether from insolence; there's something sort of haunted about it. The boy is not strong, for one thing. There is something wrong about the fellow."

The drawing master had come to realize that, in looking at Paul, one saw only his white teeth and the forced animation of his eyes. One warm afternoon the boy had gone to sleep at his drawing-board, and his master had noted with amazement what a white, blue-veined face it was; drawn and wrinkled like an old man's about the eyes, the lips twitching even in his sleep.

His teachers left the building dissatisfied and unhappy; humiliated to have felt so vindictive toward a mere boy, to have uttered this feeling in cutting terms, and to have set each other on, as it were, in the gruesome game of intemperate reproach. One of them remembered having seen a miserable street cat set at bay by a ring of tormentors.

As for Paul, he ran down the hill whistling the Soldiers' Chorus from *Faust*, looking wildly behind him now and then to see whether some of his teachers were not there to witness his light-heartedness. As it was now late in the afternoon and Paul was on duty that evening as usher at Carnegie Hall, he decided that he would not go home to supper.

When he reached the concert hall the doors were not yet open. It was chilly outside, and he decided to go up into the picture gallery—always deserted at this hour—where there were some of Raffelli's gay studies of Paris streets and an airy blue Venetian scene or two that always exhilarated him. He was delighted to find no one in the gallery but the old guard, who sat in the corner, a newspaper on his knee, a black patch over one eye and the other closed. Paul possessed himself of the place and walked confidently up and down, whistling under his

breath. After a while he sat down before a blue Rico and lost himself. When he bethought him to look at his watch, it was after seven o'clock, and he rose with a start and ran downstairs, making a face at Augustus Caesar, peering out from the cast-room, and an evil gesture at the Venus of Milo as he passed her on the stairway.

When Paul reached the ushers' dressing-room half-a-dozen boys were there already, and he began excitedly to tumble into his uniform. It was one of the few that at all approached fitting, and Paul thought it very becoming—though he knew the tight, straight coat accentuated his narrow chest, about which he was exceedingly sensitive. He was always excited while he dressed, twanging all over to the tuning of the strings and the preliminary flourishes of the horns in the music-room; but tonight he seemed quite beside himself, and he teased and plagued the boys until, telling him that he was crazy, they put him down on the floor and sat on him.

Somewhat calmed by his suppression, Paul dashed out to the front of the house to seat the early comers. He was a model usher. Gracious and smiling he ran up and down the aisles. Nothing was too much trouble for him; he carried messages and brought programs as though it were his greatest pleasure in life, and all the people in his section thought him a charming boy, feeling that he remembered and admired them. As the house filled, he grew more and more vivacious and animated, and the colour came to his cheeks and lips. It was very much as though this were a great reception and Paul were the host. Just as the musicians came out to take their places, his English teacher arrived with checks for the seats which a prominent manufacturer had taken for the season. She betrayed some embarrassment when she handed Paul the tickets, and a *hauteur* which subsequently made her feel very foolish.

Paul was startled for a moment, and had the feeling of wanting to put her out; what business had she here among all these fine people and gay colours? He looked her over and decided that she was not appropriately dressed and must be a fool to sit downstairs in such togs. The tickets had probably been sent her out of kindness, he reflected, as he put down a seat for her, and she had about as much right to sit there as he had.

When the symphony began Paul sank into one of the rear seats with a long sigh of relief, and lost himself as he had done before the Rico. It was not that symphonies, as such, meant anything in particular to Paul, but the first sigh of the instruments seemed to free some hilarious spirit within him; something that struggled there like the Genius in the bottle found by the Arab fisherman. He felt a sudden zest of life; the lights danced before his eyes and the concert hall blazed into unimaginable splendor. When the soprano soloist came on, Paul forgot even the nastiness of his teacher's being there, and gave himself up to the peculiar intoxication such personages always had for him. The soloist chanced to be a German woman, by no means in her first youth, and the mother of many children; but she wore a satin gown and a tiara, and she had that indefinable air of achievement, that world-shine upon her, which always blinded Paul to any possible defects.

After a concert was over, Paul was often irritable and wretched until he got to sleep,—and tonight he was even more than usually restless. He had the feeling of not being able to let down; of its being impossible to give up this delicious excitement which was the only thing that could be called living at all. During the last number he withdrew and, after hastily changing his clothes in the dressing-room, slipped out to the side door where the singer's

carriage stood. Here he began pacing rapidly up and down the walk, waiting to see her come out.

Over yonder the Schenley, in its vacant stretch, loomed big and square through the fine rain, the windows of its twelve stories glowing like those of a lighted cardboard house under a Christmas tree. All the actors and singers of any importance stayed there when they were in the city, and a number of the big manufacturers of the place lived there in the winter. Paul had often hung about the hotel, watching the people go in and out, longing to enter and leave school-masters and dull care behind him forever.

At last the singer came out, accompanied by the conductor, who helped her into her carriage and closed the door with a cordial "*Auf Wiedersehen*"—which set Paul to wondering whether she were not an old sweetheart of his. Paul followed the carriage over to the hotel, walking so rapidly as not to be far from the entrance when the singer alighted and disappeared behind the swinging glass doors which were opened by a negro in a tall hat and a long coat. In the moment that the door was ajar, it seemed to Paul that he, too, entered. He seemed to feel himself go after her up the steps, into the warm, lighted building, into an exotic, a tropical world of shiny, glistening surfaces and basking ease. He reflected upon the mysterious dishes that were brought into the dining-room, the green bottles in buckets of ice, as he had seen them in the supper party pictures of the Sunday supplement. A quick gust of wind brought the rain down with sudden vehemence, and Paul was startled to find that he was still outside in the slush of the gravel driveway; that his boots were letting in the water and his scanty overcoat was clinging wet about him; that the lights in front of the concert hall were out, and that the rain was driving in sheets between

him and the orange glow of the windows above him. There it was, what he wanted—tangibly before him like the fairy world of a Christmas pantomime; as the rain beat in his face, Paul wondered whether he were destined always to shiver in the black night outside, looking up at it.

He turned and walked reluctantly toward the car tracks. The end had to come sometime; his father in his night-clothes at the top of the stairs, explanations that did not explain, hastily improvised fictions that were forever tripping him up, his upstairs room and its horrible yellow wall-paper, the creaking bureau with the greasy plush collar-box, and over his painted wooden bed the pictures of George Washington and John Calvin, and the framed motto, "Feed my Lambs," which had been worked in red worsted by his mother, whom Paul could not remember.

Half an hour later Paul alighted from the Negley Avenue car and went slowly down one of the side streets off the main thoroughfare. It was a highly respectable street, where all the houses were exactly alike, and where business men of moderate means begot and reared large families of children, all of whom went to Sabbath-school and learned the shorter catechism, and were interested in arithmetic; all of whom were as exactly alike as their homes, and of a piece with the monotony in which they lived. Paul never went up Cordelia Street without a shudder of loathing. His home was next the house of the Cumberland minister. He approached it tonight with the nerveless sense of defeat, the hopeless feeling of sinking back forever into ugliness and commonness that he had always had when he came home. The moment he turned into Cordelia Street he felt the waters close above his head. After each of these orgies of living, he experienced all the physical depression which follows a debauch; the

loathing of respectable beds, of common food, of a house permeated by kitchen odors; a shuddering repulsion for the flavorless, colorless mass of every-day existence; a morbid desire for cool things and soft lights and fresh flowers.

The nearer he approached the house, the more absolutely unequal Paul felt to the sight of it all; his ugly sleeping chamber; the cold bath-room with the grimy zinc tub, the cracked mirror, the dripping spigots; his father, at the top of the stairs, his hairy legs sticking out from his night-shirt, his feet thrust into carpet slippers. He was so much later than usual that there would certainly be inquiries and reproaches. Paul stopped short before the door. He felt that he could not be accosted by his father tonight; that he could not toss again on that miserable bed. He would not go in. He would tell his father that he had no car-fare, and it was raining so hard he had gone home with one of the boys and stayed all night.

Meanwhile, he was wet and cold. He went around to the back of the house and tried one of the basement windows, found it open, raised it cautiously, and scrambled down the cellar wall to the floor. There he stood, holding his breath, terrified by the noise he had made; but the floor above him was silent, and there was no creak on the stairs. He found a soap-box, and carried it over to the soft ring of light that streamed from the furnace door, and sat down. He was horribly afraid of rats, so he did not try to sleep, but sat looking distrustfully at the dark, still terrified lest he might have awakened his father. In such reactions, after one of the experiences which made days and nights out of the dreary blanks of the calendar, when his senses were deadened, Paul's head was always singularly clear. Suppose his father had heard him getting in at the window and had come down and shot him for a burglar?

Then, again, suppose his father had come down, pistol in hand, and he had cried out in time to save himself, and his father had been horrified to think how nearly he had killed him? Then, again, suppose a day should come when his father would remember that night, and wish there had been no warning cry to stay his hand? With this last supposition Paul entertained himself until daybreak.

The following Sunday was fine; the sodden November chill was broken by the last flash of autumnal summer. In the morning Paul had to go to church and Sabbath-school, as always. On seasonable Sunday afternoons the burghers of Cordelia Street usually sat out on their front "stoops," and talked to their neighbors on the next stoop, or called to those across the street in neighborly fashion. The men sat placidly on gay cushions placed upon the steps that led down to the sidewalk, while the women, in their Sunday "waists," sat in rockers on the cramped porches, pretending to be greatly at their ease. The children played in the streets; there were so many of them that the place resembled the recreation grounds of a kindergarten. The men on the steps—all in their shirt sleeves, their vests unbuttoned—sat with their legs well apart, their stomachs comfortably protruding, and talked of the prices of things, or told anecdotes of the sagacity of their various chiefs and overlords. They occasionally looked over the multitude of squabbling children, listened affectionately to their high-pitched, nasal voices, smiling to see their own proclivities reproduced in their offspring, and interspersed their legends of the iron kings with remarks about their sons' progress at school, their grades in arithmetic, and the amounts they had saved in their toy banks.

On this last Sunday of November, Paul sat all the afternoon on the lowest step of his "stoop," staring into

the street, while his sisters, in their rockers, were talking to the minister's daughters next door about how many shirt-waists they had made in the last week, and how many waffles some one had eaten at the last church supper. When the weather was warm, and his father was in a particularly jovial frame of mind, the girls made lemonade, which was always brought out in a red-glass pitcher, ornamented with forget-me-nots in blue enamel. This the girls thought very fine, and the neighbours joked about the suspicious color of the pitcher.

Today Paul's father, on the top step, was talking to a young man who shifted a restless baby from knee to knee. He happened to be the young man who was daily held up to Paul as a model, and after whom it was his father's dearest hope that he would pattern. This young man was of a ruddy complexion, with a compressed, red mouth, and faded, near-sighted eyes, over which he wore thick spectacles, with gold bows that curved about his ears. He was clerk to one of the magnates of a great steel corporation, and was looked upon in Cordelia Street as a young man with a future. There was a story that, some five years ago —he was now barely twenty-six—he had been a trifle "dissipated," but in order to curb his appetites and save the loss of time and strength that a sowing of wild oats might have entailed, he had taken his chief's advice, oft reiterated to his employés, and at twenty-one had married the first woman whom he could persuade to share his fortunes. She happened to be an angular school-mistress, much older than he, who also wore thick glasses, and who had now borne him four children, all near-sighted, like herself.

The young man was relating how his chief, now cruising in the Mediterranean, kept in touch with all the details of the business, arranging his office hours on his yacht just

as though he were at home, and "knocking off work enough to keep two stenographers busy." His father told, in turn, the plan his corporation was considering, of putting in an electric railway plant at Cairo. Paul snapped his teeth; he had an awful apprehension that they might spoil it all before he got there. Yet he rather liked to hear these legends of the iron kings, that were told and retold on Sundays and holidays; these stories of palaces in Venice, yachts on the Mediterranean, and high play at Monte Carlo appealed to his fancy, and he was interested in the triumphs of cash boys who had become famous, though he had no mind for the cash-boy stage.

After supper was over, and he had helped to dry the dishes, Paul nervously asked his father whether he could go to George's to get some help in his geometry, and still more nervously asked for car-fare. This latter request he had to repeat, as his father, on principle, did not like to hear requests for money, whether much or little. He asked Paul whether he could not go to some boy who lived nearer, and told him that he ought not to leave his school work until Sunday; but he gave him the dime. He was not a poor man, but he had a worthy ambition to come up in the world. His only reason for allowing Paul to usher was that he thought a boy ought to be earning a little.

Paul bounded upstairs, scrubbed the greasy odor of the dish-water from his hands with the ill-smelling soap he hated, and then shook over his fingers a few drops of violet water from the bottle he kept hidden in his drawer. He left the house with his geometry conspicuously under his arm, and the moment he got out of Cordelia Street and boarded a downtown car, he shook off the lethargy of two deadening days, and began to live again.

The leading juvenile of the permanent stock company which played at one of the downtown theaters was an

acquaintance of Paul's, and the boy had been invited to drop in at the Sunday-night rehearsals whenever he could. For more than a year Paul had spent every available moment loitering about Charley Edwards' dressing-room. He had won a place among Edwards's following not only because the young actor, who could not afford to employ a dresser, often found him useful, but because he recognized in Paul something akin to what churchmen term "vocation."

It was at the theater and at Carnegie Hall that Paul really lived; the rest was but a sleep and a forgetting. This was Paul's fairy tale, and it had for him all the allurement of a secret love. The moment he inhaled the gassy, painty, dusty odor behind the scenes, he breathed like a prisoner set free, and felt within him the possibility of doing or saying splendid, brilliant things. The moment the cracked orchestra beat out the overture from *Martha,* or jerked at the serenade from *Rigoletto,* all stupid and ugly things slid from him, and his senses were deliciously, yet delicately fired.

Perhaps it was because, in Paul's world, the natural nearly always wore the guise of ugliness, that a certain element of artificiality seemed to him necessary in beauty. Perhaps it was because his experience of life elsewhere was so full of Sabbath-school picnics, petty economies, wholesome advice as to how to succeed in life, and the unescapable odors of cooking, that he found this existence so alluring, these smartly-clad men and women so attractive, that he was so moved by these starry apple orchards that bloomed perennially under the lime-light.

It would be difficult to put it strongly enough how convincingly the stage entrance of that theater was for Paul the actual portal of Romance. Certainly none of the company ever suspected it, least of all Charley Edwards. It

was very like the old stories that used to float about London of fabulously rich Jews, who had subterranean halls, with palms, and fountains, and soft lamps and richly appareled women who never saw the disenchanting light of London day. So, in the midst of that smoke-palled city, enamored of figures and grimy toil, Paul had his secret temple, his wishing-carpet, his bit of blue-and-white Mediterranean shore bathed in perpetual sunshine.

Several of Paul's teachers had a theory that his imagination had been perverted by garish fiction; but the truth was, he scarcely ever read at all. The books at home were not such as would either tempt or corrupt a youthful mind, and as for reading the novels that some of his friends urged upon him—well, he got what he wanted much more quickly from music; any sort of music, from an orchestra to a barrel organ. He needed only the spark, the indescribable thrill that made his imagination master of his senses, and he could make plots and pictures enough of his own. It was equally true that he was not stage-struck—not, at any rate, in the usual acceptation of that expression. He had no desire to become an actor, any more than he had to become a musician. He felt no necessity to do any of these things; what he wanted was to see, to be in the atmosphere, float on the wave of it, to be carried out, blue league after blue league, away from everything.

After a night behind the scenes, Paul found his schoolroom more than ever repulsive; the hard floors and naked walls; the prosy men who never wore frock coats, or violets in their button-holes; the women with their dull gowns, shrill voices, and pitiful seriousness about prepositions that govern the dative. He could not bear to have the other pupils think, for a moment, that he took these people seriously; he must convey to them that he considered it all trivial, and was there only by way of a joke, anyway. He

had autograph pictures of all the members of the stock company which he showed his classmates, telling them the most incredible stories of his familiarity with these people, of his acquaintance with the soloists who came to Carnegie Hall, his suppers with them and the flowers he sent them. When these stories lost their effect, and his audience grew listless, he would bid all the boys good-bye, announcing that he was going to travel for a while; going to Naples, to California, to Egypt. Then, next Monday, he would slip back, conscious and nervously smiling; his sister was ill, and he would have to defer his voyage until spring.

Matters went steadily worse with Paul at school. In the itch to let his instructors know how heartily he despised them, and how thoroughly he was appreciated elsewhere, he mentioned once or twice that he had no time to fool with theorems; adding—with a twitch of the eyebrows and a touch of that nervous bravado which so perplexed them—that he was helping the people down at the stock company; they were old friends of his.

The upshot of the matter was, that the Principal went to Paul's father, and Paul was taken out of school and put to work. The manager at Carnegie Hall was told to get another usher in his stead; the doorkeeper at the theater was warned not to admit him to the house; and Charley Edwards remorsefully promised the boy's father not to see him again.

The members of the stock company were vastly amused when some of Paul's stories reached them—especially the women. They were hard-working women, most of them supporting indolent husbands or brothers, and they laughed rather bitterly at having stirred the boy to such fervid and florid inventions. They agreed with the faculty and with his father, that Paul's was a bad case.

The east-bound train was plowing through a January snow-storm; the dull dawn was beginning to show gray when the engine whistled a mile out of Newark. Paul started up from the seat where he had lain curled in uneasy slumber, rubbed the breath-misted window glass with his hand, and peered out. The snow was whirling in curling eddies above the white bottom lands, and the drifts lay already deep in the fields and along the fences, while here and there the long dead grass and dried weed stalks protruded black above it. Lights shone from the scattered houses, and a gang of laborers who stood beside the track waved their lanterns.

Paul had slept very little, and he felt grimy and uncomfortable. He had made the all-night journey in a day coach because he was afraid if he took a Pullman he might be seen by some Pittsburgh business man who had noticed him in Denny & Carson's office. When the whistle woke him, he clutched quickly at his breast pocket, glancing about him with an uncertain smile. But the little, clay-bespattered Italians were still sleeping, the slatternly women across the aisle were in open-mouthed oblivion, and even the crumby, crying babies were for the nonce stilled. Paul settled back to struggle with his impatience as best he could.

When he arrived at the Jersey City Station, he hurried through his breakfast, manifestly ill at ease and keeping a sharp eye about him. After he reached the Twenty-third Street Station, he consulted a cabman, and had himself driven to a men's furnishing establishment which was just opening for the day. He spent upward of two hours there, buying with endless reconsidering and great care. His new street suit he put on in the fitting-room; the frock coat and dress clothes he had bundled into the cab with his new shirts. Then he drove to a hatter's and a shoe house.

His next errand was at Tiffany's, where he selected silver-mounted brushes and a scarf-pin. He would not wait to have his silver marked, he said. Lastly, he stopped at a trunk shop on Broadway, and had his purchases packed into various traveling bags.

It was a little after one o'clock when he drove up to the Waldorf, and, after settling with the cabman, went into the office. He registered from Washington; said his mother and father had been abroad, and that he had come down to await the arrival of their steamer. He told his story plausibly and had no trouble, since he offered to pay for them in advance, in engaging his rooms; a sleeping-room, sitting-room and bath.

Not once, but a hundred times Paul had planned this entry into New York. He had gone over every detail of it with Charley Edwards, and in his scrap book at home there were pages of description about New York hotels, cut from the Sunday papers.

When he was shown to his sitting-room on the eighth floor, he saw at a glance that everything was as it should be; there was but one detail in his mental picture that the place did not realize, so he rang for the bell boy and sent him down for flowers. He moved about nervously until the boy returned, putting away his new linen and fingering it delightedly as he did so. When the flowers came, he put them hastily into water, and then tumbled into a hot bath. Presently he came out of his white bath-room, resplendent in his new silk underwear, and playing with the tassels of his red robe. The snow was whirling so fiercely outside his windows that he could scarcely see across the street; but within, the air was deliciously soft and fragrant. He put the violets and jonquils on the tabouret beside the couch, and threw himself down with a long sigh, covering himself with a Roman blanket. He was thoroughly tired; he had

been in such haste, he had stood up to such a strain, covered so much ground in the last twenty-four hours, that he wanted to think how it had all come about. Lulled by the sound of the wind, the warm air, and the cool fragrance of the flowers, he sank into deep, drowsy retrospection.

It had been wonderfully simple; when they had shut him out of the theater and concert hall, when they had taken away his bone, the whole thing was virtually determined. The rest was a mere matter of opportunity. The only thing that at all surprised him was his own courage —for he realized well enough that he had always been tormented by fear, a sort of apprehensive dread that, of late years, as the meshes of the lies he had told closed about him, had been pulling the muscles of his body tighter and tighter. Until now, he could not remember a time when he had not been dreading something. Even when he was a little boy, it was always there—behind him, or before, or on either side. There had always been the shadowed corner, the dark place into which he dared not look, but from which something seemed always to be watching him—and Paul had done things that were not pretty to watch, he knew.

But now he had a curious sense of relief, as though he had at last thrown down the gauntlet to the thing in the corner.

Yet it was but a day since he had been sulking in the traces; but yesterday afternoon that he had been sent to the bank with Denny & Carson's deposit as usual—but this time he was instructed to leave the book to be balanced. There was above two thousand dollars in checks, and nearly a thousand in the bank notes which he had taken from the book and quietly transferred to his pocket. At the bank he had made out a new deposit slip. His nerves

had been steady enough to permit of his returning to the office, where he had finished his work and asked for a full day's holiday tomorrow, Saturday, giving a perfectly reasonable pretext. The bank book, he knew, would not be returned before Monday or Tuesday, and his father would be out of town for the next week. From the time he slipped the bank notes into his pocket until he boarded the night train for New York, he had not known a moment's hesitation.

How astonishingly easy it had all been; here he was, the thing done; and this time there would be no awakening, no figure at the top of the stairs. He watched the snow flakes whirling by his window until he fell asleep.

When he awoke, it was four o'clock in the afternoon. He bounded up with a start; one of his precious days gone already! He spent nearly an hour in dressing, watching every stage of his toilet carefully in the mirror. Everything was quite perfect; he was exactly the kind of boy he had always wanted to be.

When he went downstairs, Paul took a carriage and drove up Fifth Avenue toward the Park. The snow had somewhat abated; carriages and tradesmen's wagons were hurrying soundlessly to and fro in the winter twilight; boys in woolen mufflers were shoveling off the doorsteps; the avenue stages made fine spots of color against the white street. Here and there on the corners were stands, with whole flower gardens blooming behind glass windows, against which the snow flakes stuck and melted; violets, roses, carnations, lilies of the valley—somehow vastly more lovely and alluring that they blossomed thus unnaturally in the snow. The Park itself was a wonderful stage winter piece.

When he returned, the pause of the twilight had ceased, and the tune of the streets had changed. The snow was

falling faster, lights streamed from the hotels that reared their many stories fearlessly up into the storm, defying the raging Atlantic winds. A long, black stream of carriages poured down the avenue, intersected here and there by other streams, tending horizontally. There were a score of cabs about the entrance of his hotel, and his driver had to wait. Boys in livery were running in and down the red velvet carpet laid from the door to the street. Above, about, within it all, was the rumble and roar, the hurry and toss of thousands of human beings as hot for pleasure as himself, and on every side of him towered the glaring affirmation of the omnipotence of wealth.

The boy set his teeth and drew his shoulders together in a spasm of realization; the plot of all dramas, the text of all romances, the nerve-stuff of all sensations was whirling about him like the snowflakes. He burnt like a faggot in a tempest.

When Paul came down to dinner, the music of the orchestra floated up the elevator shaft to greet him. As he stepped into the thronged corridor, he sank back into one of the chairs against the wall to get his breath. The lights, the chatter, the perfumes, the bewildering medley of color—he had, for a moment, the feeling of not being able to stand it. But only for a moment; these were his own people, he told himself. He went slowly about the corridors, through the writing-rooms, smoking-rooms, reception-rooms, as though he were exploring the chambers of an enchanted palace, built and peopled for him alone.

When he reached the dining-room he sat down at a table near a window. The flowers, the white linen, the many-colored wine glasses, the gay toilettes of the women, the low popping of corks, the undulating repetitions of the *Blue Danube* from the orchestra, all flooded

Paul's dream with bewildering radiance. When the roseate tinge of his champagne was added—that cold, precious bubbling stuff that creamed and foamed in his glass—Paul wondered that there were honest men in the world at all. This was what all the world was fighting for, he reflected; this was what all the struggle was about. He doubted the reality of his past. Had he ever known a place called Cordelia Street, a place where fagged-looking business men boarded the early car? Mere rivets in a machine they seemed to Paul,—sickening men, with combings of children's hair always hanging to their coats, and the smell of cooking in their clothes. Cordelia Street —ah, that belonged to another time and country! Had he not always been thus, had he not sat here night after night, from as far back as he could remember, looking pensively over just such shimmering textures, and slowly twirling the stem of a glass like this one between his thumb and middle finger? He rather thought he had.

He was not in the least abashed or lonely. He had no especial desire to meet or to know any of these people; all he demanded was the right to look on and conjecture, to watch the pageant. The mere stage properties were all he contended for. Nor was he lonely later in the evening, in his loge at the Opera. He was entirely rid of his nervous misgivings, of his forced aggressiveness, of the imperative desire to show himself different from his surroundings. He felt now that his surroundings explained him. Nobody questioned his purple; he had only to wear it passively. He had only to glance down at his dress coat to reassure himself that here it would be impossible for any one to humiliate him.

He found it hard to leave his beautiful sitting-room to go to bed that night, and sat long watching the raging storm from his turret window. When he went to sleep,

it was with the lights turned on in his bedroom; partly because of his old timidity, and partly so that, if he should wake in the night, there would be no wretched moment of doubt, no horrible suspicion of yellow wall-paper, or of Washington and Calvin above his bed.

On Sunday morning the city was practically snow-bound. Paul breakfasted late, and in the afternoon he fell in with a wild San Francisco boy, a freshman at Yale, who said he had run down for a "little flyer" over Sunday. The young man offered to show Paul the night side of the town, and the two boys went off together after dinner, not returning to the hotel until seven o'clock the next morning. They had started out in the confiding warmth of a champagne friendship, but their parting in the elevator was singularly cool. The freshman pulled himself together to make his train, and Paul went to bed. He awoke at two o'clock in the afternoon, very thirsty and dizzy, and rang for ice-water, coffee, and the Pittsburgh papers.

On the part of the hotel management, Paul excited no suspicion. There was this to be said for him, that he wore his spoils with dignity and in no way made himself conspicuous. His chief greediness lay in his ears and eyes, and his excesses were not offensive ones. His dearest pleasures were the gray winter twilights in his sitting-room; his quiet enjoyment of his flowers, his clothes, his wide divan, his cigarette and his sense of power. He could not remember a time when he had felt so at peace with himself. The mere release from the necessity of petty lying, lying every day and every day, restored his self-respect. He had never lied for pleasure, even at school; but to make himself noticed and admired, to assert his difference from other Cordelia Street boys; and he felt a good deal more manly, more honest, even, now that he

had no need for boastful pretensions, now that he could, as his actor friends used to say, "dress the part." It was characteristic that remorse did not occur to him. His golden days went by without a shadow, and he made each as perfect as he could.

On the eighth day after his arrival in New York, he found the whole affair exploited in the Pittsburgh papers, exploited with a wealth of detail which indicated that local news of a sensational nature was at a low ebb. The firm of Denny & Carson announced that the boy's father had refunded the full amount of his theft, and that they had no intention of prosecuting. The Cumberland minister had been interviewed, and expressed his hope of yet reclaiming the motherless lad, and Paul's Sabbath-school teacher declared that she would spare no effort to that end. The rumor had reached Pittsburgh that the boy had been seen in a New York hotel, and his father had gone East to find him and bring him home.

Paul had just come in to dress for dinner; he sank into a chair, weak in the knees, and clasped his head in his hands. It was to be worse than jail, even; the tepid waters of Cordelia Street were to close over him finally and forever. The gray monotony stretched before him in hopeless, unrelieved years; Sabbath-school, Young People's Meeting, the yellow-papered room, the damp dish-towels; it all rushed back upon him with sickening vividness. He had the old feeling that the orchestra had suddenly stopped, the sinking sensation that the play was over. The sweat broke out on his face, and he sprang to his feet, looked about him with his white, conscious smile, and winked at himself in the mirror. With something of the childish belief in miracles with which he had so often gone to class, all his lessons unlearned, Paul dressed and dashed whistling down the corridor to the elevator.

He had no sooner entered the dining-room and caught the measure of the music, than his remembrance was lightened by his old elastic power of claiming the moment, mounting with it, and finding it all-sufficient. The glare and glitter about him, the mere scenic accessories had again, and for the last time, their old potency. He would show himself that he was game, he would finish the thing splendidly. He doubted, more than ever, the existence of Cordelia Street, and for the first time he drank his wine recklessly. Was he not, after all, one of these fortunate beings? Was he not still himself, and in his own place? He drummed a nervous accompaniment to the music and looked about him, telling himself over and over that it had paid.

He reflected drowsily, to the swell of the violin and the chill sweetness of his wine, that he might have done it more wisely. He might have caught an outbound steamer and been well out of their clutches before now. But the other side of the world had seemed too far away and too uncertain then; he could not have waited for it; his need had been too sharp. If he had to choose over again, he would do the same thing tomorrow. He looked affectionately about the dining-room, now gilded with a soft mist. Ah, it had paid indeed!

Paul was awakened next morning by a painful throbbing in his head and feet. He had thrown himself across the bed without undressing, and had slept with his shoes on. His limbs and hands were lead-heavy, and his tongue and throat were parched. There came upon him one of those fateful attacks of clear-headedness that never occurred except when he was physically exhausted and his nerves hung loose. He lay still and closed his eyes and let the tide of his realities wash over him.

His father was in New York; "stopping at some joint

or other," he told himself. The memory of successive summers on the front stoop fell upon him like a weight of black water. He had not a hundred dollars left; and he knew now, more than ever, that money was everything, the wall that stood between all he loathed and all he wanted. The thing was winding itself up; he had thought of that on his first glorious day in New York, and had even provided a way to snap the thread. It lay on his dressing-table now; he had got it out last night when he came blindly up from dinner,—but the shiny metal hurt his eyes, and he disliked the look of it, anyway.

He rose and moved about with a painful effort, succumbing now and again to attacks of nausea. It was the old depression exaggerated; all the world had become Cordelia Street. Yet somehow he was not afraid of anything, was absolutely calm; perhaps because he had looked into the dark corner at last, and knew. It was bad enough, what he saw there; but somehow not so bad as his long fear of it had been. He saw everything clearly now. He had a feeling that he had made the best of it, that he had lived the sort of life he was meant to live, and for half an hour he sat staring at the revolver. But he told himself that was not the way, so he went downstairs and took a cab to the ferry.

When Paul arrived at Newark, he got off the train and took another cab, directing the driver to follow the Pennsylvania tracks out of the town. The snow lay heavy on the roadways and had drifted deep in the open fields. Only here and there the dead grass or dried weed stalks projected, singularly black, above it. Once well into the country, Paul dismissed the carriage and walked, floundering along the tracks, his mind a medley of irrelevant things. He seemed to hold in his brain an actual picture of everything he had seen that morning. He remembered

every feature of both his drivers, the toothless old woman from whom he had bought the red flowers in his coat, the agent from whom he had got his ticket, and all of his fellow-passengers on the ferry. His mind, unable to cope with vital matters near at hand, worked feverishly and deftly at sorting and grouping these images. They made for him a part of the ugliness of the world, of the ache in his head, and the bitter burning on his tongue. He stooped and put a handful of snow into his mouth as he walked, but that, too, seemed hot. When he reached a little hillside, where the tracks ran through a cut some twenty feet below him, he stopped and sat down.

The carnations in his coat were drooping with the cold, he noticed; all their red glory over. It occurred to him that all the flowers he had seen in the show windows that first night must have gone the same way, long before this. It was only one splendid breath they had, in spite of their brave mockery at the winter outside the glass. It was a losing game in the end, it seemed, this revolt against the homilies by which the world is run. Paul took one of the blossoms carefully from his coat and scooped a little hole in the snow, where he covered it up. Then he dozed a while, from his weak condition, seeming insensible to the cold.

The sound of an approaching train woke him, and he started to his feet, remembering only his resolution, and afraid lest he should be too late. He stood watching the approaching locomotive, his teeth chattering, his lips drawn away from them in a frightened smile; once or twice he glanced nervously sidewise, as though he were being watched. When the right moment came, he jumped. As he fell, the folly of his haste occurred to him with merciless clearness, the vastness of what he had left undone. There

flashed through his brain, clearer than ever before, the blue of Adriatic water, the yellow of Algerian sands.

He felt something strike his chest,—his body was being thrown swiftly through the air, on and on, immeasurably far and fast, while his limbs gently relaxed. Then, because the picture-making mechanism was crushed, the disturbing visions flashed into black, and Paul dropped back into the immense design of things.

THE BLUE CROSS [1]

by G. K. Chesterton

(1874–1936)

Gilbert Keith Chesterton was born in London in 1874. He turned early from a clerkship to literature and has written everything from theological tracts to detective stories. His style is distinguished for the "sophistication of its method and the use of paradox." Delighting in conservatism he is invariably a champion of the established order, defending enthusiasms which range from "penny dreadfuls" to the Anglo-Catholic Church. Nowhere is this more apparent than in his Father Brown stories. His books include *Charles Dickens, Orthodoxy, Tremendous Trifles,* and *The Innocence of Father Brown.*

Between the silver ribbon of morning and the green glittering ribbon of sea, the boat touched Harwich and let loose a swarm of folk like flies, among whom the man we must follow was by no means conspicuous—nor wished to be. There was nothing notable about him, except a slight contrast between the holiday gayety of his clothes and the official gravity of his face. His clothes included a slight, pale gray jacket, a white waistcoat, and a silver straw hat with a gray-blue ribbon. His lean face was dark by contrast, and ended in a curt black beard that looked Spanish and suggested an Elizabethan ruff. He was smoking a cigarette with the seriousness of an idler. There was nothing about him to indicate the fact that the gray jacket covered a loaded revolver, that the white waistcoat covered a police card, or that the straw hat covered one of the most powerful intellects in Europe.

[1] From *The Innocence of Father Brown,* copyright by Dodd, Mead and Company, Inc.

For this was Valentin himself, the head of the Paris police and the most famous investigator of the world; and he was coming from Brussels to London to make the greatest arrest of the century.

Flambeau was in England. The police of three countries had tracked the great criminal at last from Ghent to Brussels, from Brussels to the Hook of Holland; and it was conjectured that he would take some advantage of the unfamiliarity and confusion of the Eucharistic Congress, then taking place in London. Probably he would travel as some minor clerk or secretary connected with it; but, of course, Valentin could not be certain; nobody could be certain about Flambeau.

It is many years now since this colossus of crime suddenly ceased keeping the world in a turmoil; and when he ceased, as they said after the death of Roland, there was a great quiet upon the earth. But in his best days (I mean, of course, his worst) Flambeau was a figure as statuesque and international as the Kaiser. Almost every morning the daily paper announced that he had escaped the consequences of one extraordinary crime by committing another. He was a Gascon of gigantic stature and bodily daring; and the wildest tales were told of his outburst of athletic humor; how he turned the *juge d'instruction* upside down and stood him on his head, "to clear his mind"; how he ran down the Rue de Rivoli with a policeman under each arm. It is due to him to say that his fantastic physical strength was generally employed in such bloodless though undignified scenes; his real crimes were chiefly those of ingenious and wholesale robbery. But each of his thefts was almost a new sin, and would make a story by itself. It was he who ran the great Tyrolean Dairy Company in London, with no dairies, no cows, no carts, no milk, but with some thousand subscribers. These he served by the

simple operation of moving the little milk cans outside people's doors to the doors of his own customers. It was he who had kept up an unaccountable and close correspondence with a young lady whose whole letter-bag was intercepted, by the extraordinary trick of photographing his messages infinitesimally small upon the slides of a microscope. A sweeping simplicity, however, marked many of his experiments. It is said that he once repainted all the numbers in a street in the dead of night merely to divert one traveler into a trap. It is quite certain that he invented a portable pillar-box, which he put up at corners in quiet suburbs on the chance of strangers dropping postal orders into it. Lastly, he was known to be a startling acrobat; despite his huge figure, he could leap like a grasshopper and melt into the tree-tops like a monkey. Hence the great Valentin, when he set out to find Flambeau, was perfectly aware that his adventures would not end when he had found him.

But how was he to find him? On this the great Valentin's ideas were still in process of settlement.

There was one thing which Flambeau, with all his dexterity of disguise, could not cover, and that was his singular height. If Valentin's quick eye had caught a tall apple-woman, a tall grenadier, or even a tolerably tall duchess, he might have arrested them on the spot. But all along his train there was nobody that could be a disguised Flambeau, any more than a cat could be a disguised giraffe. About the people on the boat he had already satisfied himself; and the people picked up at Harwich or on the journey limited themselves with certainty to six. There was a short railway official traveling up to the terminus, three fairly short market gardeners picked up two stations afterwards, one very short widow lady going up from a small Essex town, and a very short Roman Catholic

priest going up from a small Essex village. When it came to the last case, Valentin gave it up and almost laughed. The little priest was so much the essence of those Eastern flats; he had a face as round and dull as a Norfolk dumpling; he had eyes as empty as the North Sea; he had several brown paper parcels, which he was quite incapable of collecting. The Eucharistic Congress had doubtless sucked out of their local stagnation many such creatures, blind and helpless, like moles disinterred. Valentin was a skeptic in the severe style of France, and could have no love for priests. But he could have pity for them, and this one might have provoked pity in anybody. He had a large, shabby umbrella, which constantly fell on the floor. He did not seem to know which was the right end of his return ticket. He explained with a moon-calf simplicity to everybody in the carriage that he had to be careful, because he had something made of real silver "with blue stones" in one of his brown-paper parcels. His quaint blending of Essex flatness with saintly simplicity continuously amused the Frenchman till the priest arrived (somehow) at Tottenham with all his parcels, and came back for his umbrella. When he did the last, Valentin even had the good nature to warn him not to take care of the silver by telling everybody about it. But to whomever he talked, Valentin kept his eye open for some one else; he looked out steadily for any one, rich or poor, male or female, who was well up to six feet; for Flambeau was four inches above it.

He alighted at Liverpool Street, however, quite conscientiously secure that he had not missed the criminal so far. He then went to Scotland Yard to regularize his position and arrange for help in case of need; he then lit another cigarette and went for a long stroll in the streets of London. As he was walking in the streets and squares

beyond Victoria, he paused suddenly and stood. It was a quaint, quiet square, very typical of London, full of an accidental stillness. The tall, flat houses round looked at once prosperous and uninhabited; the square of shrubbery in the center looked as deserted as a green Pacific islet. One of the four sides was much higher than the rest, like a dais; and the line of this side was broken by one of London's admirable accidents—a restaurant that looked as if it had strayed from Soho. It was an unreasonably attractive object, with dwarf plants in pots and long, striped blinds of lemon yellow and white. It stood specially high above the street, and in the usual patchwork way of London, a flight of steps from the street ran up to meet the front door almost as a fire-escape might run up to a first-floor window. Valentin stood and smoked in front of the yellow-white blinds and considered them long.

The most incredible thing about miracles is that they happen. A few clouds in heaven do come together into the staring shape of one human eye. A tree does stand up in the landscape of a doubtful journey in the exact and elaborate shape of a note of interrogation. I have seen both these things myself within the last few days. Nelson does die in the instant of victory; and a man named Williams does quite accidentally murder a man named Williamson; it sounds like a sort of infanticide. In short, there is in life an element of elfin coincidence which people reckoning on the prosaic may perpetually miss. As it has been well expressed in the paradox of Poe, wisdom should reckon on the unforeseen.

Aristide Valentin was unfathomably French; and the French intelligence is intelligence specially and solely. He was not "a thinking machine"; for that is a brainless phrase of modern fatalism and materialism. A machine only *is* a machine because it cannot think. But he was a

thinking man, and a plain man at the same time. All his wonderful successes, that looked like conjuring, had been gained by plodding logic, by clear and commonplace French thought. The French electrify the world not by starting any paradox, they electrify it by carrying out a truism. They carry a truism so far—as in the French Revolution. But exactly because Valentin understood reason, he understood the limits of reason. Only a man who knows nothing of motors talks of motoring without petrol; only a man who knows nothing of reason talks of reasoning without strong, undisputed first principles. Here he had no strong first principles. Flambeau had been missed at Harwich; and if he was in London at all, he might be anything from a tall tramp on Wimbledon Common to a tall toastmaster at the Hôtel Métropole. In such a naked state of nescience, Valentin had a view and a method of his own.

In such cases he reckoned on the unforeseen. In such cases, when he could not follow the train of the reasonable, he coldly and carefully followed the train of the unreasonable. Instead of going to the right places—banks, police stations, rendezvous—he systematically went to the wrong places; knocked at every empty house, turned down every *cul de sac*, went up every lane blocked with rubbish, went round every crescent that led him uselessly out of the way. He defended this crazy course quite logically. He said that if one had a clue this was the worst way; but if one had no clue at all it was the best, because there was just the chance that any oddity that caught the eye of the pursuer might be the same that had caught the eye of the pursued. Somewhere a man must begin, and it had better be just where another man might stop. Something about that flight of steps up to the shop, something about the quietude and quaintness of the restaurant, roused all the

detective's rare romantic fancy and made him resolve to strike at random. He went up the steps, and sitting down at a table by the window, asked for a cup of black coffee.

It was half-way through the morning, and he had not breakfasted; the slight litter of other breakfasts stood about on the table to remind him of his hunger; and adding a poached egg to his order, he proceeded musingly to shake some white sugar into his coffee, thinking all the time about Flambeau. He remembered how Flambeau had escaped, once by a pair of nail scissors, and once by a house on fire; once by having to pay for an unstamped letter, and once by getting people to look through a telescope at a comet that might destroy the world. He thought his detective brain as good as the criminal's, which was true. But he fully realized the disadvantage. "The criminal is the creative artist; the detective only the critic," he said with a sour smile, and lifted his coffee cup to his lips slowly, and put it down very quickly. He had put salt in it.

He looked at the vessel from which the silvery powder had come; it was certainly a sugar-basin; as unmistakably meant for sugar as a champagne bottle for champagne. He wondered why they should keep salt in it. He looked to see if there were any more orthodox vessels. Yes; there were two salt-cellars quite full. Perhaps there was some specialty in the condiment in the salt-cellars. He tasted it; it was sugar. Then he looked round at the restaurant with a refreshed air of interest, to see if there were any other traces of that singular artistic taste which puts the sugar in the salt-cellars and the salt in the sugar-basin. Except for an odd splash of some dark fluid on one of the white-papered walls, the whole place appeared neat, cheerful and ordinary. He rang the bell for the waiter.

When that official hurried up, fuzzy-haired and some-

what blear-eyed at that early hour, the detective (who was not without an appreciation of the simpler forms of humor) asked him to taste the sugar and see if it was up to the high reputation of the hotel. The result was that the waiter yawned suddenly and woke up.

"Do you play this delicate joke on your customers every morning?" inquired Valentin. "Does changing the salt and sugar never pall on you as a jest?"

The waiter, when this irony grew clearer, stammeringly assured him that the establishment had certainly no such intention; it must be a most curious mistake. He picked up the sugar-basin and looked at it; he picked up the salt-cellar and looked at that, his face growing more and more bewildered. At last he abruptly excused himself, and hurrying away, returned in a few seconds with the proprietor. The proprietor also examined the sugar-basin and then the salt-cellar; the proprietor also looked bewildered.

Suddenly the waiter seemed to grow inarticulate with a rush of words.

"I zink," he stuttered eagerly, "I zink it is those two clergymen."

"What two clergymen?"

"The two clergymen," said the waiter, "that threw soup at the wall."

"Threw soup at the wall?" repeated Valentin, feeling sure this must be some singular Italian metaphor.

"Yes, yes," said the attendant excitedly, and pointing at the dark splash on the white paper; "threw it over there on the wall."

Valentin looked his query at the proprietor, who came to his rescue with fuller reports.

"Yes, sir," he said, "it's quite true, though I don't suppose it has anything to do with the sugar and salt. Two clergymen came in and drank soup here very early, as soon

as the shutters were taken down. They were both very quiet, respectable people; one of them paid the bill and went out; the other, who seemed a slower coach altogether, was some minutes longer getting his things together. But he went at last. Only, the instant before he stepped into the street he deliberately picked up his cup, which he had only half emptied, and threw the soup slap on the wall. I was in the back room myself, and so was the waiter; so I could only rush out in time to find the wall splashed and the shop empty. It don't do any particular damage, but it was confounded cheek; and I tried to catch the men in the street. They were too far off though; I only noticed they went round the next corner into Carstairs Street."

The detective was on his feet, hat settled and stick in his hand. He had already decided that in the universal darkness of his mind he could only follow the first odd finger that pointed; and this finger was odd enough. Paying his bill and clashing the glass doors behind him, he was soon swinging round into the other street.

It was fortunate that even in such fevered moments his eye was cool and quick. Something in a shop-front went by him like a mere flash; yet he went back to look at it. The shop was a popular greengrocer and fruiterer's, an array of goods set out in the open air and plainly ticketed with their names and prices. In the two most prominent compartments were two heaps, of oranges and of nuts respectively. On the heap of nuts lay a scrap of cardboard, on which was written in bold, blue chalk, "Best tangerine oranges, two a penny." On the oranges was the equally clear and exact description, "Finest Brazil nuts, 4d. a lb." M. Valentin looked at these two placards and fancied he had met this highly subtle form of humor before, and that somewhat recently. He drew the attention of the red-faced fruiterer, who was looking rather sullenly up and

down the street, to this inaccuracy in his advertisements. The fruiterer said nothing, but sharply put each card into its proper place. The detective, leaning elegantly on his walking-cane, continued to scrutinize the shop. At last he said, "Pray excuse my apparent irrelevance, my good sir, but I should like to ask you a question in experimental psychology and the association of ideas."

The red-faced shopman regarded him with an eye of menace; but he continued gayly, swinging his cane. "Why," he pursued, "why are two tickets wrongly placed in a greengrocer's shop like a shovel hat that has come to London for a holiday? Or, in case I do not make myself clear, what is the mystical association which connects the idea of nuts marked as oranges with the idea of two clergymen, one tall and the other short?"

The eyes of the tradesman stood out of his head like a snail's; he really seemed for an instant likely to fling himself upon the stranger. At last he stammered angrily: "I don't know what you 'ave to do with it, but if you're one of their friends, you can tell 'em from me that I'll knock their silly 'eads off, parsons or no parsons, if they upset my apples again."

"Indeed," asked the detective, with great sympathy. "Did they upset your apples?"

"One of 'em did," said the heated shopman; "rolled 'em all over the street. I'd 'ave caught the fool but for havin' to pick 'em up."

"Which way did these parsons go?" asked Valentin.

"Up that second road on the left-hand side, and then across the square," said the other promptly.

"Thanks," replied Valentin, and vanished like a fairy. On the other side of the second square he found a policeman, and said: "This is urgent, constable; have you seen two clergymen in shovel hats?"

The policeman began to chuckle heavily. "I 'ave, sir; and if you arst me, one of 'em was drunk. He stood in the middle of the road that bewildered that—"

"Which way did they go?" snapped Valentin.

"They took one of them yellow buses over there," answered the man; "them that go to Hampstead."

Valentin produced his official card and said very rapidly: "Call up two of your men to come with me in pursuit," and crossed the road with such contagious energy that the ponderous policeman was moved to almost agile obedience. In a minute and a half the French detective was joined on the opposite pavement by an inspector and a man in plain clothes.

"Well, sir," began the former, with smiling importance, "and what may—?"

Valentin pointed suddenly with his cane. "I'll tell you on the top of that omnibus," he said, and was darting and dodging across the tangle of the traffic. When all three sank panting on the top seats of the yellow vehicle, the inspector said: "We could go four times as quick in a taxi."

"Quite true," replied their leader placidly, "if we only had an idea of where we were going."

"Well, where *are* you going?" asked the other, staring.

Valentin smoked frowningly for a few seconds; then, removing his cigarette, he said: "If you *know* what a man's doing, get in front of him; but if you want to guess what he's doing, keep behind him. Stray when he strays; stop when he stops; travel as slowly as he. Then you may see what he saw and may act as he acted. All we can do is to keep our eyes skinned for a queer thing."

"What sort of queer thing do you mean?" asked the inspector.

"Any sort of queer thing," answered Valentin, and relapsed into obstinate silence.

The yellow omnibus crawled up the northern roads for what seemed like hours on end; the great detective would not explain further, and perhaps his assistants felt a silent and growing doubt of his errand. Perhaps, also, they felt a silent and growing desire for lunch, for the hours crept long past the normal luncheon hour, and the long roads of the North London suburbs seemed to shoot out into length after length like an infernal telescope. It was one of those journeys on which a man perpetually feels that now at last he must have come to the end of the universe, and then finds he has only come to the beginning of Tufnell Park. London died away in draggled taverns and dreary scrubs, and then was unaccountably born again in blazing high streets and blatant hotels. It was like passing through thirteen separate vulgar cities all just touching each other. But though the winter twilight was already threatening the road ahead of them, the Parisian detective still sat silent and watchful, eyeing the frontage of the streets that slid by on either side. By the time they had left Camden Town behind, the policemen were nearly asleep; at least, they gave something like a jump as Valentin leaped erect, struck a hand on each man's shoulder, and shouted to the driver to stop.

They tumbled down the steps into the road without realizing why they had been dislodged; when they looked round for enlightenment they found Valentin triumphantly pointing his finger towards a window on the left side of the road. It was a large window, forming part of the long façade of a gilt and palatial public-house; it was the part reserved for respectable dining, and labeled "Restaurant." This window, like all the rest along the

frontage of the hotel, was of frosted and figured glass; but in the middle of it was a big, black smash, like a star in the ice.

"Our cue at last," cried Valentin, waving his stick: "the place with the broken window."

"What window? What cue?" asked his principal assistant. "Why, what proof is there that this has anything to do with them?"

Valentin almost broke his bamboo stick with rage.

"Proof!" he cried. "Good God! the man is looking for proof! Why, of course, the chances are twenty to one that it has *nothing* to do with them. But what else can we do? Don't you see we must either follow one wild possibility or else go home to bed?" He banged his way into the restaurant, followed by his companions, and they were soon seated at a late luncheon at a little table, and looking at the star of smashed glass from the inside. Not that it was very informative to them even then.

"Got your window broken, I see," said Valentin to the waiter as he paid the bill.

"Yes, sir," answered the attendant, bending busily over the change, to which Valentin silently added an enormous tip. The waiter straightened himself with mild but unmistakable animation.

"Ah, yes, sir," he said. "Very odd thing, that, sir."

"Indeed? Tell us about it," said the detective with careless curiosity.

"Well, two gents in black came in," said the waiter; "two of those foreign parsons that are running about. They had a cheap and quiet little lunch, and one of them paid for it and went out. The other was just going out to join him when I looked at my change again and found he'd paid me more than three times too much. 'Here,' I says to the chap who was nearly out of the door, 'you've

paid too much.' 'Oh,' he says, very cool, 'have we?' 'Yes,' I says, and picks up the bill to show him. Well, that was a knockout."

"What do you mean?" asked his interlocutor.

"Well, I'd have sworn on seven Bibles that I'd put 4s. on that bill. But now I saw I'd put 14s., as plain as paint."

"Well?" cried Valentin, moving slowly, but with burning eyes, "and then?"

"The parson at the door he says all serene, 'Sorry to confuse your accounts, but it'll pay for the window.' 'What window?' I says. 'The one I'm going to break,' he says, and smashed that blessed pane with his umbrella."

All three inquirers made an exclamation; and the inspector said under his breath, "Are we after escaped lunatics?" The waiter went on with some relish for the ridiculous story:

"I was so knocked silly for a second, I couldn't do anything. The man marched out of the place and joined his friend just round the corner. Then they went so quick up Bullock Street that I couldn't catch them, though I ran round the bars to do it."

"Bullock Street," said the detective, and shot up that thoroughfare as quickly as the strange couple he pursued.

Their journey now took them through bare brick ways like tunnels; streets with few lights and even with few windows; streets that seemed built out of the blank backs of everything and everywhere. Dusk was deepening, and it was not easy even for the London policemen to guess in what exact direction they were treading. The inspector, however, was pretty certain that they would eventually strike some part of Hampstead Heath. Abruptly one bulging gas-lit window broke the blue twilight like a bull's-eye lantern; and Valentin stopped an instant before a little garish sweetstuff shop. After an instant's hesitation he

went in; he stood amid the gaudy colors of the confectionery with entire gravity and bought thirteen chocolate cigars with a certain care. He was clearly preparing an opening, but he did not need one.

An angular, elderly young woman in the shop had regarded his elegant appearance with a merely automatic inquiry; but when she saw the door behind him blocked with the blue uniform of the inspector, her eyes seemed to wake up.

"Oh," she said, "if you've come about that parcel, I've sent it off already."

"Parcel!" repeated Valentin; and it was his turn to look inquiring.

"I mean the parcel the gentleman left—the clergyman gentleman."

"For goodness' sake," said Valentin, leaning forward with his first real confession of eagerness, "for Heaven's sake tell us what happened exactly."

"Well," said the woman a little doubtfully, "the clergymen came in about half an hour ago and bought some peppermints and talked a bit, and then went off towards the Heath. But a second after, one of them runs back into the shop and says, 'Have I left a parcel?' Well, I looked everywhere and couldn't see one; so he says, 'Never mind; but if it should turn up, please post it to this address,' and he left me the address and a shilling for my trouble. And sure enough, though I thought I'd looked everywhere, I found he'd left a brown paper parcel, so I posted it to the place he said. I can't remember the address now; it was somewhere in Westminster. But as the thing seemed so important, I thought perhaps the police had come about it."

"So they have," said Valentin shortly. "Is Hampstead Heath near here?"

"Straight on for fifteen minutes," said the woman, "and you'll come right out on the open." Valentin sprang out of the shop and began to run. The other detectives followed him at a reluctant trot.

The street they threaded was so narrow and shut in by shadows that when they came out unexpectedly into the void common and vast sky they were startled to find the evening still so light and clear. A perfect dome of peacock-green sank into gold amid the blackening trees and the dark violet distances. The glowing green tint was just deep enough to pick out in points of crystal one or two stars. All that was left of the daylight lay in a golden glitter across the edge of Hampstead and that popular hollow which is called the Vale of Health. The holiday makers who roam this region had not wholly dispersed; a few couples sat shapelessly on benches; and here and there a distant girl still shrieked in one of the swings. The glory of heaven deepened and darkened around the sublime vulgarity of man; and standing on the slope and looking across the valley, Valentin beheld the thing which he sought.

Among the black and breaking groups in that distance was one especially black which did not break—a group of two figures clerically clad. Though they seemed as small as insects, Valentin could see that one of them was much smaller than the other. Though the other had a student's stoop and an inconspicuous manner, he could see that the man was well over six feet high. He shut his teeth and went forward, whirling his stick impatiently. By the time he had substantially diminished the distance and magnified the two black figures as in a vast microscope, he had perceived something else; something which startled him, and yet which he had somehow expected. Whoever was the tall priest, there could be no doubt about the identity of the

short one. It was his friend of the Harwich train, the stumpy little *curé* of Essex whom he had warned about his brown paper parcels.

Now, so far as this went, everything fitted in finally and rationally enough. Valentin had learned by his inquiries that morning that a Father Brown from Essex was bringing up a silver cross with sapphires, a relic of considerable value, to show some of the foreign priests at the congress. This undoubtedly was the "silver with blue stones"; and Father Brown undoubtedly was the little greenhorn in the train. Now there was nothing wonderful about the fact that what Valentin had found out Flambeau had also found out; Flambeau found out everything. Also there was nothing wonderful in the fact that when Flambeau heard of a sapphire cross he should try to steal it; that was the most natural thing in all natural history. And most certainly there was nothing wonderful about the fact that Flambeau should have it all his own way with such a silly sheep as the man with the umbrella and the parcels. He was the sort of man whom anybody could lead on a string to the North Pole; it was not surprising that an actor like Flambeau, dressed as another priest, could lead him to Hampstead Heath. So far the crime seemed clear enough; and while the detective pitied the priest for his helplessness, he almost despised Flambeau for condescending to so gullible a victim. But when Valentin thought of all that had happened in between, of all that had led him to his triumph, he racked his brains for the smallest rhyme or reason in it. What had the stealing of a blue-and-silver cross from a priest from Essex to do with chucking soup at wall paper? What had it to do with calling nuts oranges, or with paying for windows first and breaking them afterwards? He had come to the end of his chase; yet somehow he had missed the middle

of it. When he failed (which was seldom), he had usually grasped the clue, but nevertheless missed the criminal. Here he had grasped the criminal, but still he could not grasp the clue.

The two figures that they followed were crawling like black flies across the huge green contour of a hill. They were evidently sunk in conversation, and perhaps did not notice where they were going; but they were certainly going to the wilder and more silent heights of the Heath. As their pursuers gained on them, the latter had to use the undignified attitudes of the deer-stalker, to crouch behind clumps of trees and even to crawl prostrate in deep grass. By these ungainly ingenuities the hunters even came close enough to the quarry to hear the murmur of the discussion, but no word could be distinguished except the word "reason" recurring frequently in a high and almost childish voice. Once over an abrupt dip of land and a dense tangle of thickets, the detectives actually lost the two figures they were following. They did not find the trail again for an agonizing ten minutes, and then it led round the brow of a great dome of hill overlooking an amphitheater of rich and desolate sunset scenery. Under a tree in this commanding yet neglected spot was an old ramshackle wooden seat. On this seat sat the two priests still in serious speech together. The gorgeous green and gold still clung to the darkening horizon; but the dome above was turning slowly from peacock-green to peacock-blue, and the stars detached themselves more and more like solid jewels. Mutely motioning to his followers, Valentin contrived to creep up behind the big branching tree, and, standing there in deathly silence, heard the words of the strange priests for the first time.

After he had listened for a minute and a half, he was gripped by a devilish doubt. Perhaps he had dragged the

two English policemen to the wastes of a nocturnal heath on an errand no saner than seeking figs on its thistles. For the two priests were talking exactly like priests, piously, with learning and leisure, about the most aerial enigmas of theology. The little Essex priest spoke the more simply, with his round face turned to the strengthening stars; the other talked with his head bowed, as if he were not even worthy to look at them. But no more innocently clerical conversation could have been heard in any white Italian cloister or black Spanish cathedral.

The first he heard was the tail of one of Father Brown's sentences, which ended: ". . . what they really meant in the Middle Ages by the heavens being incorruptible."

The taller priest nodded his bowed head and said:

"Ah, yes, these modern infidels appeal to their reason; but who can look at those millions of worlds and not feel that there may well be wonderful universes above us where reason is utterly unreasonable?"

"No," said the other priest: "reason is always reasonable, even in the last limbo, in the lost borderland of things. I know that people charge the Church with lowering reason, but it is just the other way. Alone on earth, the Church makes reason really supreme. Alone on earth, the Church affirms that God himself is bound by reason."

The other priest raised his austere face to the spangled sky and said:

"Yet who knows if in that infinite universe—?"

"Only infinite physically," said the little priest, turning sharply in his seat, "not infinite in the sense of escaping from the laws of truth."

Valentin behind his tree was tearing his finger-nails with silent fury. He seemed almost to hear the sniggers of the English detectives whom he had brought so far on a fantastic guess only to listen to the metaphysical gossip of two mild old parsons. In his impatience he lost the equally

elaborate answer of the tall cleric, and when he listened again it was Father Brown who was speaking:

"Reason and justice grip the remotest and loneliest star. Look at those stars. Don't they look as if they were single diamonds and sapphires? Well, you can imagine any mad botany or geology you please. Think of forests of adamant with leaves of brilliants. Think the moon is a blue moon, a single elephantine sapphire. But don't fancy that all that frantic astronomy would make the smallest difference to the reason and justice of conduct. On plains of opal, under cliffs cut out of pearl, you would still find a notice-board, 'Thou shalt not steal.' "

Valentin was just in the act of rising from his rigid and crouching attitude and creeping away as softly as might be, felled by the one great folly of his life. But something in the very silence of the tall priest made him stop until the latter spoke. When at last he did speak, he said simply, his head bowed and his hands on his knees:

"Well, I still think that other worlds may perhaps rise higher than our reason. The mystery of heaven is unfathomable, and I for one can only bow my head."

Then, with brow yet bent and without changing by the faintest shade his attitude or voice, he added:

"Just hand over that sapphire cross of yours, will you? We're all alone here, and I could pull you to pieces like a straw doll."

The utterly unaltered voice and attitude added a strange violence to that shocking change of speech. But the guarder of the relic only seemed to turn his head by the smallest section of the compass. He seemed still to have a somewhat foolish face turned to the stars. Perhaps he had not understood. Or, perhaps, he had understood and sat rigid with terror.

"Yes," said the tall priest, in the same low voice and in the same still posture, "yes, I am Flambeau."

Then, after a pause, he said:

"Come, will you give me that cross?"

"No," said the other, and the monosyllable had an odd sound.

Flambeau suddenly flung off all his pontifical pretensions. The great robber leaned back in his seat and laughed low but long.

"No," he cried, "you won't give it me, you proud prelate. You won't give it me, you little celibate simpleton. Shall I tell you why you won't give it me? Because I've got it already in my own breast-pocket."

The small man from Essex turned what seemed to be a dazed face in the dusk, and said, with the timid eagerness of "The Private Secretary":

"Are—are you sure?"

Flambeau yelled with delight.

"Really, you're as good as a three-act farce," he cried. "Yes, you turnip, I am quite sure. I had the sense to make a duplicate of the right parcel, and now, my friend, you've got the duplicate and I've got the jewels. An old dodge, Father Brown—a very old dodge."

"Yes," said Father Brown, and passed his hand through his hair with the same strange vagueness of manner. "Yes, I've heard of it before."

The colossus of crime leaned over to the little rustic priest with a sort of sudden interest.

"*You* have heard of it?" he asked. "Where have *you* heard of it?"

"Well, I mustn't tell you his name, of course," said the little man simply. "He was a penitent, you know. He had lived prosperously for about twenty years entirely on duplicate brown paper parcels. And so, you see, when I began to suspect you, I thought of this poor chap's way of doing it at once."

"Began to suspect me?" repeated the outlaw with increased intensity. "Did you really have the gumption to suspect me just because I brought you up to this bare part of the heath?"

"No, no," said Father Brown with an air of apology. "You see, I suspected you when we first met. It's that little bulge up the sleeve where you people have the spiked bracelet."

"How in Tartarus," cried Flambeau, "did you ever hear of the spiked bracelet?"

"Oh, one's little flock, you know!" said Father Brown, arching his eyebrows rather blankly. "When I was a curate in Hartlepool, there were three of them with spiked bracelets. So, as I suspected you from the first, don't you see, I made sure that the cross should go safe, anyhow. I'm afraid I watched you, you know. So at last I saw you change the parcels. Then, don't you see, I changed them back again. And then I left the right one behind."

"Left it behind?" repeated Flambeau, and for the first time there was another note in his voice beside his triumph.

"Well, it was like this," said the little priest, speaking in the same unaffected way. "I went back to that sweet-shop and asked if I'd left a parcel, and gave them a particular address if it turned up. Well, I knew I hadn't; but when I went away again I did. So, instead of running after me with that valuable parcel, they have sent it flying to a friend of mine in Westminster." Then he added rather sadly: "I learnt that, too, from a poor fellow in Hartlepool. He used to do it with handbags he stole at railway stations, but he's in a monastery now. Oh, one gets to know, you know," he added, rubbing his head again with the same sort of desperate apology. "We can't help it being priests. People come and tell us these things."

Flambeau tore a brown paper parcel out of his inner

pocket and rent it in pieces. There was nothing but paper and sticks of lead inside it. He sprang to his feet with a gigantic gesture, and cried:

"I don't believe you. I don't believe a bumpkin like you could manage all that. I believe you've still got the stuff on you, and if you don't give it up—why, we're all alone, and I'll take it by force!"

"No," said Father Brown simply, and stood up also, "you won't take it by force. First, because I really haven't still got it. And, second, because we are not alone."

Flambeau stopped in his stride forward.

"Behind that tree," said Father Brown, pointing, "are two strong policemen and the greatest detective alive. How did they come here, do you ask? Why, I brought them, of course! How did I do it? Why, I'll tell you if you like! Lord bless you, we have to know twenty such things when we work among the criminal classes! Well, I wasn't sure you were a thief, and it would never do to make a scandal against one of our own clergy. So I just tested you to see if anything would make you show yourself. A man generally makes a small scene if he finds salt in his coffee; if he doesn't, he has some reason for keeping quiet. I changed the salt and sugar, and *you* kept quiet. A man generally objects if his bill is three times too big. If he pays it, he has some motive for passing unnoticed. I altered your bill, and *you* paid it."

The world seemed waiting for Flambeau to leap like a tiger. But he was held back as by a spell; he was stunned with the utmost curiosity.

"Well," went on Father Brown, with lumbering lucidity, "as you wouldn't leave any tracks for the police, of course somebody had to. At every place we went to, I took care to do something that would get us talked about for the rest of the day. I didn't do much harm—a splashed

wall, spilt apples, a broken window; but I saved the cross, as the cross will always be saved. It is at Westminster by now. I rather wonder you didn't stop it with the Donkey's Whistle."

"With the what?" asked Flambeau.

"I'm glad you've never heard of it," said the priest, making a face. "It's a foul thing. I'm sure you're too good a man for a Whistler. I couldn't have countered it even with the Spots myself; I'm not strong enough in the legs."

"What on earth are you talking about?" asked the other.

"Well, I did think you'd know the Spots," said Father Brown, agreeably surprised. "Oh, you can't have gone so very wrong yet!"

"How in blazes do you know all these horrors?" cried Flambeau.

The shadow of a smile crossed the round, simple face of his clerical opponent.

"Oh, by being a celibate simpleton, I suppose," he said. "Has it never struck you that a man who does next to nothing but hear men's real sins is not likely to be wholly unaware of human evil? But, as a matter of fact, another part of my trade, too, made me sure you weren't a priest."

"What?" asked the thief, almost gaping.

"You attacked reason," said Father Brown. "It's bad theology."

And even as he turned away to collect his property, the three policemen came out from under the twilight trees. Flambeau was an artist and a sportsman. He stepped back and swept Valentin a great bow.

"Do not bow to me, *mon ami*," said Valentin with silver clearness. "Let us both bow to our master."

And they both stood an instant uncovered while the little Essex priest blinked about for his umbrella.

THE IDIOTS [1]

by Joseph Conrad

Teodor Josef Konrad Korzeniowski was born in Poland in 1857. When he was nineteen he shipped before the mast and for nearly twenty years sailed about the world. From his voyages he gained his knowledge of the eastern islands he used so effectively in his stories. He died in England in 1924. Until Conrad was twenty he knew no English, but a decade before his death Galsworthy was able to say that his work was "probably the only writing of the last twelve years that will enrich the English language to any great extent." Conrad in speaking of his own writing said: "My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you *see*." The suggestion for the story included here came to Conrad when he saw the actual idiots themselves while he was in Brittany. Notable among his books are *The Nigger of the Narcissus, Lord Jim, Nostromo,* and *Youth.*

We were driving along the road from Treguier to Kervanda. We passed at a smart trot between the hedges topping an earth wall on each side of the road; then at the foot of the steep ascent before Ploumar the horse dropped into a walk, and the driver jumped down heavily from the box. He flicked his whip and climbed the incline, stepping clumsily uphill by the side of the carriage, one hand on the footboard, his eyes on the ground. After a while he lifted his head, pointed up the road with the end of the whip, and said—

"The idiot!"

The sun was shining violently upon the undulating surface of the land. The rises were topped by clumps

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of meager trees, with their branches showing high on the sky as if they had been perched upon stilts. The small fields, cut up by hedges and stone walls that zigzagged over the slopes, lay in rectangular patches of vivid greens and yellows, resembling the unskilful daubs of a naïve picture. And the landscape was divided in two by the white streak of a road stretching in long loops far away, like a river of dust crawling out of the hills on its way to the sea.

"Here he is," said the driver, again.

In the long grass bordering the road a face glided past the carriage at the level of the wheels as we drove slowly by. The imbecile face was red, and the bullet head with close-cropped hair seemed to lie alone, its chin in the dust. The body was lost in the bushes growing thick along the bottom of the deep ditch.

It was a boy's face. He might have been sixteen, judging from the size—perhaps less, perhaps more. Such creatures are forgotten by time, and live untouched by years till death gathers them up into its compassionate bosom; the faithful death that never forgets in the press of work the most insignificant of its children.

"Ah! there's another," said the man, with a certain satisfaction in his tone, as if he had caught sight of something expected.

There was another. That one stood nearly in the middle of the road in the blaze of sunshine at the end of his own short shadow. And he stood with hands pushed into the opposite sleeves of his long coat, his head sunk between the shoulders, all hunched up in the flood of heat. From a distance he had the aspect of one suffering from intense cold.

"Those are twins," explained the driver.

The idiot shuffled two paces out of the way and looked

at us over his shoulder when we brushed past him. The glance was unseeing and staring, a fascinated glance; but he did not turn to look after us. Probably the image passed before the eyes without leaving any trace on the misshapen brain of the creature. When we had topped the ascent I looked over the hood. He stood in the road just where we had left him.

The driver clambered into his seat, clicked his tongue, and we went downhill. The brake squeaked horribly from time to time. At the foot he eased off the noisy mechanism and said, turning half round on his box—

"We shall see some more of them by-and-by."

"More idiots? How many of them are there, then?" I asked.

"There's four of them—children of a farmer near Ploumar here. . . . The parents are dead now," he added, after a while. "The grandmother lives on the farm. In the daytime they knock about on this road, and they come home at dusk along with the cattle. . . . It's a good farm."

We saw the other two: a boy and a girl, as the driver said. They were dressed exactly alike, in shapeless garments with petticoat-like skirts. The imperfect thing that lived within them moved those beings to howl at us from the top of the bank, where they sprawled amongst the tough stalks of furze. Their cropped black heads stuck out from the bright yellow wall of countless small blossoms. The faces were purple with the strain of yelling; the voices sounded blank and cracked like a mechanical imitation of old people's voices; and suddenly ceased when we turned into a lane.

I saw them many times in my wandering about the country. They lived on that road, drifting along its length here and there, according to the inexplicable im-

pulses of their monstrous darkness. They were an offense to the sunshine, a reproach to empty heaven, a blight on the concentrated and purposeful vigor of the wild landscape. In time the story of their parents shaped itself before me out of the listless answers to my questions, out of the indifferent words heard in wayside inns or on the very road those idiots haunted. Some of it was told by an emaciated and skeptical old fellow with a tremendous whip, while we trudged together over the sands by the side of a two-wheeled cart loaded with dripping seaweed. Then at other times other people confirmed and completed the story: till it stood at last before me, a tale formidable and simple, as they always are, those disclosures of obscure trials endured by ignorant hearts.

When he returned from his military service Jean-Pierre Bacadou found the old people very much aged. He remarked with pain that the work of the farm was not satisfactorily done. The father had not the energy of old days. The hands did not feel over them the eye of the master. Jean-Pierre noted with sorrow that the heap of manure in the courtyard before the only entrance to the house was not so large as it should have been. The fences were out of repair, and the cattle suffered from neglect. At home the mother was practically bedridden, and the girls chattered loudly in the big kitchen, unrebuked, from morning to night. He said to himself: "We must change all this." He talked the matter over with his father one evening when the rays of the setting sun entering the yard between the outhouses ruled the heavy shadows with luminous streaks. Over the manure heap floated a mist, opal-tinted and odorous, and the marauding hens would stop in their scratching to examine with a sudden glance of their round eye the two men, both lean and tall, talking in hoarse tones. The old man, all twisted with

rheumatism and bowed with years of work, the younger bony and straight, spoke without gestures in the indifferent manner of peasants, grave and slow. But before the sun had set the father had submitted to the sensible arguments of the son. "It is not for me that I am speaking," insisted Jean-Pierre. "It is for the land. It's a pity to see it badly used. I am not impatient for myself." The old fellow nodded over his stick. "I dare say; I dare say," he muttered. "You may be right. Do what you like. It's the mother that will be pleased."

The mother was pleased with her daughter-in-law. Jean-Pierre brought the two-wheeled spring-cart with a rush into the yard. The gray horse galloped clumsily, and the bride and bridegroom, sitting side by side, were jerked backwards and forwards by the up and down motion of the shafts, in a manner regular and brusque. On the road the distanced wedding guests straggled in pairs and groups. The men advanced with heavy steps, swinging their idle arms. They were clad in town clothes; jackets cut with clumsy smartness, hard black hats, immense boots, polished highly. Their women all in simple black, with white caps and shawls of faded tints folded triangularly on the back, strolled lightly by their side. In front the violin sang a strident tune, and the biniou snored and hummed, while the player capered solemnly, lifting high his heavy clogs. The somber procession drifted in and out of the narrow lanes, through sunshine and through shade, between fields and hedgerows, scaring the little birds that darted away in troops right and left. In the yard of Bacadou's farm the dark ribbon wound itself up into a mass of men and women pushing at the door with cries and greetings. The wedding dinner was remembered for months. It was a splendid feast in the orchard. Farmers of considerable means and excellent repute were to be

found sleeping in ditches, all along the road to Treguier, even as late as the afternoon of the next day. All the countryside participated in the happiness of Jean-Pierre. He remained sober, and, together with his quiet wife, kept out of the way, letting father and mother reap their due of honor and thanks. But the next day he took hold strongly, and the old folks felt a shadow—precursor of the grave—fall upon them finally. The world is to the young.

When the twins were born there was plenty of room in the house, for the mother of Jean-Pierre had gone away to dwell under a heavy stone in the cemetery of Ploumar. On that day, for the first time since his son's marriage, the elder Bacadou, neglected by the cackling lot of strange women who thronged the kitchen, left in the morning his seat under the mantel of the fireplace, and went into the empty cow-house, shaking his white locks dismally. Grandsons were all very well, but he wanted his soup at midday. When shown the babies, he stared at them with a fixed gaze, and muttered something like: "It's too much." Whether he meant too much happiness, or simply commented upon the number of his descendants, it is impossible to say. He looked offended—as far as his old wooden face could express anything; and for days afterwards could be seen, almost any time of the day, sitting at the gate, with his nose over his knees, a pipe between his gums, and gathered up into a kind of raging concentrated sulkiness. Once he spoke to his son, alluding to the newcomers with a groan: "They will quarrel over the land." "Don't bother about that, father," answered Jean-Pierre, stolidly, and passed, bent double, towing a recalcitrant cow over his shoulder.

He was happy, and so was Susan, his wife. It was not an ethereal joy welcoming new souls to struggle, per-

chance to victory. In fourteen years both boys would be a help; and, later on, Jean-Pierre pictured two big sons striding over the land from patch to patch, wringing tribute from the earth beloved and fruitful. Susan was happy too, for she did not want to be spoken of as the unfortunate woman, and now she had children no one could call her that. Both herself and her husband had seen something of the larger world—he during the time of his service; while she had spent a year or so in Paris with a Breton family; but had been too homesick to remain longer away from the hilly and green country, set in a barren circle of rocks and sands, where she had been born. She thought that one of the boys ought perhaps to be a priest, but said nothing to her husband, who was a republican, and hated the "crows," as he called the ministers of religion. The christening was a splendid affair. All the commune came to it, for the Bacadous were rich and influential, and, now and then, did not mind the expense. The grandfather had a new coat.

Some months afterwards, one evening when the kitchen had been swept, and the door locked, Jean-Pierre, looking at the cot, asked his wife: "What's the matter with those children?" And, as if these words, spoken calmly, had been the portent of misfortune, she answered with a loud wail that must have been heard across the yard in the pig-sty; for the pigs (the Bacadous had the finest pigs in the country) stirred and grunted complainingly in the night. The husband went on grinding his bread and butter slowly, gazing at the wall, the soup-plate smoking under his chin. He had returned late from the market, where he had overheard (not for the first time) whispers behind his back. He revolved the words in his mind as he drove back. "Simple! Both of them. . . . Never any use! . . . Well! Maybe, maybe. One must see. Would ask his

wife." This was her answer. He felt like a blow on his chest, but said only: "Go, draw me some cider. I am thirsty!"

She went out moaning, an empty jug in her hand. Then he arose, took up the light, and moved slowly towards the cradle. They slept. He looked at them sideways, finished his mouthful there, went back heavily, and sat down before his plate. When his wife returned he never looked up, but swallowed a couple of spoonfuls noisily, and remarked, in a dull manner—

"When they sleep they are like other people's children."

She sat down suddenly on a stool near by, and shook with a silent tempest of sobs, unable to speak. He finished his meal, and remained idly thrown back in his chair, his eyes lost amongst the black rafters of the ceiling. Before him the tallow candle flared red and straight, sending up a slender thread of smoke. The light lay on the rough, sunburnt skin of his throat; the sunk cheeks were like patches of darkness, and his aspect was mournfully stolid, as if he had ruminated with difficulty endless ideas. Then he said, deliberately—

"We must see . . . consult people. Don't cry. . . . They won't all be like that . . . surely! We must sleep now."

After the third child, also a boy, was born, Jean-Pierre went about his work with tense hopefulness. His lips seemed more narrow, more tightly compressed than before; as if for fear of letting the earth he tilled hear the voice of hope that murmured within his breast. He watched the child, stepping up to the cot with a heavy clang of sabots on the stone floor, and glanced in, along his shoulder, with that indifference which is like a deformity of peasant humanity. Like the earth they master

and serve, those men, slow of eye and speech, do not show the inner fire; so that, at last, it becomes a question with them as with the earth, what there is in the core: heat, violence, a force mysterious and terrible—or nothing but a clod, a mass fertile and inert, cold and unfeeling, ready to bear a crop of plants that sustain life or give death.

The mother watched with other eyes; listened with otherwise expectant ears. Under the high hanging shelves supporting great sides of bacon overhead, her body was busy by the great fireplace, attentive to the pot swinging on iron gallows, scrubbing the long table where the field hands would sit down directly to their evening meal. Her mind remained by the cradle, night and day on the watch, to hope and suffer. That child, like the other two, never smiled, never stretched its hands to her, never spoke; never had a glance of recognition for her in its big black eyes, which could only stare fixedly at any glitter, but failed hopelessly to follow the brilliance of a sun-ray slipping slowly along the floor. When the men were at work she spent long days between her three idiot children and the childish grandfather, who sat grim, angular, and immovable, with his feet near the warm ashes of the fire. The feeble old fellow seemed to suspect that there was something wrong with his grandsons. Only once, moved either by affection or by the sense of proprieties, he attempted to nurse the youngest. He took the boy up from the floor, clicked his tongue at him, and essayed a shaky gallop of his bony knees. Then he looked closely with his misty eyes at the child's face and deposited him down gently on the floor again. And he sat, his lean shanks crossed, nodding at the steam escaping from the cooking-pot with a gaze senile and worried.

Then mute affliction dwelt in Bacadou's farmhouse, sharing the breath and the bread of its inhabitants; and

the priest of the Ploumar parish had great cause for congratulation. He called upon the rich landowner, the Marquis de Chavanes, on purpose to deliver himself with joyful unction of solemn platitudes about the inscrutable ways of Providence. In the vast dimness of the curtained drawing-room, the little man, resembling a black bolster, leaned towards a couch, his hat on his knees, and gesticulated with a fat hand at the elongated, gracefully-flowing lines of the clear Parisian toilette from within which the half-amused, half-bored marquise listened with gracious languor. He was exulting and humble, proud and awed. The impossible had come to pass. Jean-Pierre Bacadou, the enraged republican farmer, had been to mass last Sunday—had proposed to entertain the visiting priests at the next festival of Ploumar! It was a triumph for the Church and for the good cause. "I thought I would come at once to tell Monsieur le Marquis. I know how anxious he is for the welfare of our country," declared the priest, wiping his face. He was asked to stay to dinner.

The Chavanes returning that evening, after seeing their guest to the main gate of the park, discussed the matter while they strolled in the moonlight, trailing their long shadows up the straight avenue of chestnuts. The marquis, a royalist of course, had been mayor of the commune which includes Ploumar, the scattered hamlets of the coast, and the stony islands that fringe the yellow flatness of the sands. He had felt his position insecure, for there was a strong republican element in that part of the country; but now the conversion of Jean-Pierre made him safe. He was very pleased. "You have no idea how influential those people are," he explained to his wife. "Now, I am sure, the next communal election will go all right. I shall be re-elected." "Your ambition is perfectly insatiable, Charles," exclaimed the marquise, gaily. "But,

ma chère amie," argued the husband, seriously, "it's most important that the right man should be mayor this year, because of the elections to the Chamber. If you think it amuses me . . ."

Jean-Pierre had surrendered to his wife's mother. Madame Levaille was a woman of business, known and respected within a radius of at least fifteen miles. Thick-set and stout, she was seen about the country, on foot or in an acquaintance's cart, perpetually moving, in spite of her fifty-eight years, in steady pursuit of business. She had houses in all the hamlets, she worked quarries of granite, she freighted coasters with stone—even traded with the Channel Islands. She was broad-cheeked, wide-eyed, persuasive in speech: carrying her point with the placid and invincible obstinacy of an old woman who knows her own mind. She very seldom slept for two nights together in the same house; and the wayside inns were the best places to inquire in as to her whereabouts. She had either passed, or was expected to pass there at six; or somebody, coming in, had seen her in the morning, or expected to meet her that evening. After the inns that command the roads, the churches were the buildings she frequented most. Men of liberal opinions would induce small children to run into sacred edifices to see whether Madame Levaille was there, and to tell her that so-and-so was in the road waiting to speak to her—about potatoes, or flour, or stones, or houses; and she would curtail her devotions, come out blinking and crossing herself into the sunshine; ready to discuss business matters in a calm, sensible way across a table in the kitchen of the inn opposite. Latterly she had stayed for a few days several times with her son-in-law, arguing against sorrow and misfortune with composed face and gentle tones. Jean-Pierre felt the convictions imbibed in the regiment torn

out of his breast—not by arguments, but by facts. Striding over his fields he thought it over. There were three of them. Three! All alike! Why? Such things did not happen to everybody—to nobody he ever heard of. One—might pass. But three! All three. Forever useless, to be fed while he lived and . . . What would become of the land when he died? This must be seen to. He would sacrifice his convictions. One day he told his wife—

"See what your God will do for us. Pay for some masses."

Susan embraced her man. He stood unbending, then turned on his heels and went out. But afterwards, when a black *soutane* darkened his doorway, he did not object; even offered some cider himself to the priest. He listened to the talk meekly; went to mass between the two women; accomplished what the priest called "his religious duties" at Easter. That morning he felt like a man who had sold his soul. In the afternoon he fought ferociously with an old friend and neighbor who had remarked that the priests had the best of it and were now going to eat the priest-eater. He came home disheveled and bleeding, and happening to catch sight of his children (they were kept generally out of the way), cursed and swore incoherently, banging the table. Susan wept. Madame Levaille sat serenely unmoved. She assured her daughter that "It will pass"; and taking up her thick umbrella, departed in haste to see after a schooner she was going to load with granite from her quarry.

A year or so afterwards the girl was born. A girl. Jean-Pierre heard of it in the fields, and was so upset by the news that he sat down on the boundary wall and remained there till the evening, instead of going home as he was urged to do. A girl! He felt half cheated. However, when he got home he was partly reconciled to his fate. One

could marry her to a good fellow—not to a good-for-nothing, but to a fellow with some understanding and a good pair of arms. Besides, the next may be a boy, he thought. Of course they would be all right. His new credulity knew of no doubt. The ill luck was broken. He spoke cheerily to his wife. She was also hopeful. Three priests came to that christening, and Madame Levaille was godmother. The child turned out an idiot too.

Then on market days Jean-Pierre was seen bargaining bitterly, quarrelsome and greedy; then getting drunk with taciturn earnestness; then driving home in the dusk at a rate fit for a wedding, but with a face gloomy enough for a funeral. Sometimes he would insist on his wife coming with him; and they would drive in the early morning, shaking side by side on the narrow seat above the helpless pig, that, with tied legs, grunted a melancholy sigh at every rut. The morning drives were silent; but in the evening, coming home, Jean-Pierre, tipsy, was viciously muttering, and growled at the confounded woman who could not rear children that were like anybody else's. Susan, holding on against the erratic swayings of the cart, pretended not to hear. Once, as they were driving through Ploumar, some obscure and drunken impulse caused him to pull up sharply opposite the church. The moon swam amongst light white clouds. The tombstones gleamed pale under the fretted shadows of the trees in the churchyard. Even the village dogs slept. Only the nightingales, awake, spun out the thrill of their song above the silence of graves. Jean-Pierre said thickly to his wife—

"What do you think is there?"

He pointed his whip at the tower—in which the big dial of the clock appeared high in the moonlight like a pallid face without eyes—and getting out carefully, fell down at once by the wheel. He picked himself up and climbed

one by one the few steps to the iron gate of the churchyard. He put his face to the bars and called out indistinctly—

"Hey there! Come out!"

"Jean! Return! Return!" entreated his wife in low tones.

He took no notice, and seemed to wait there. The song of nightingales beat on all sides against the high walls of the church, and flowed back between stone crosses and flat gray slabs, engraved with words of hope and sorrow.

"Hey! Come out!" shouted Jean-Pierre, loudly.

The nightingales ceased to sing.

"Nobody?" went on Jean-Pierre. "Nobody there. A swindle of the crows. That's what this is. Nobody anywhere. I despise it. *Allez! Houp!*"

He shook the gate with all his strength, and the iron bars rattled with a frightful clanging, like a chain dragged over stone steps. A dog near by barked hurriedly. Jean-Pierre staggered back, and after three successive dashes got into his cart. Susan sat very quiet and still. He said to her with drunken severity—

"See? Nobody. I've been made a fool! *Malheur!* Somebody will pay for it. The next one I see near the house I will lay my whip on . . . on the black spine . . . I will. I don't want him in there . . . he only helps the carrion crows to rob poor folk. I am a man. . . . We will see if I can't have children like anybody else . . . now you mind. . . . They won't be all . . . all . . . we see. . . ."

She burst out through the fingers that hid her face—

"Don't say that, Jean; don't say that, my man!"

He struck her a swinging blow on the head with the back of his hand and knocked her into the bottom of the cart, where she crouched, thrown about lamentably by

every jolt. He drove furiously, standing up, brandishing his whip, shaking the reins over the gray horse that galloped ponderously, making the heavy harness leap upon his broad quarters. The country rang clamorous in the night with the irritated barking of farm dogs, that followed the rattle of wheels all along the road. A couple of belated wayfarers had only just time to step into the ditch. At his own gate he caught the post and was shot out of the cart head first. The horse went on slowly to the door. At Susan's piercing cries the farm hands rushed out. She thought him dead, but he was only sleeping where he fell, and cursed his men, who hastened to him, for disturbing his slumbers.

Autumn came. The clouded sky descended low upon the black contours of the hills; and the dead leaves danced in spiral whirls under naked trees, till the wind, sighing profoundly, laid them to rest in the hollows of bare valleys. And from morning till night one could see all over the land black denuded boughs, the boughs gnarled and twisted, as if contorted with pain, swaying sadly between the wet clouds and the soaked earth. The clear and gentle streams of summer days rushed discolored and raging at the stones that barred the way to the sea, with the fury of madness bent upon suicide. From horizon to horizon the great road to the sands lay between the hills in a dull glitter of empty curves, resembling an unnavigable river of mud.

Jean-Pierre went from field to field, moving blurred and tall in the drizzle, or striding on the crests of rises, lonely and high upon the gray curtain of drifting clouds, as if he had been pacing along the very edge of the universe. He looked at the black earth, at the earth mute and promising, at the mysterious earth doing its work of life in death-like stillness under the veiled sorrow of the sky.

And it seemed to him that to a man worse than childless there was no promise in the fertility of fields, that from him the earth escaped, defied him, frowned at him like the clouds, somber and hurried above his head. Having to face alone his own fields, he felt the inferiority of man who passes away before the clod that remains. Must he give up the hope of having by his side a son who would look at the turned-up sods with a master's eye? A man that would think as he thought, that would feel as he felt; a man who would be part of himself, and yet remain to trample masterfully on that earth when he was gone? He thought of some distant relations, and felt savage enough to curse them aloud. They! Never! He turned homewards, going straight at the roof of his dwelling, visible between the enlaced skeletons of trees. As he swung his legs over the stile a cawing flock of birds settled slowly on the field; dropped down behind his back, noiseless and fluttering, like flakes of soot.

That day Madame Levaille had gone early in the afternoon to the house she had near Kervanion. She had to pay some of the men who worked in her granite quarry there, and she went in good time because her little house contained a shop where the workmen could spend their wages without the trouble of going to town. The house stood alone amongst rocks. A lane of mud and stones ended at the door. The sea-winds coming ashore on Stonecutters' Point, fresh from the fierce turmoil of the waves, howled violently at the unmoved heaps of black boulders holding up steadily short-armed, high crosses against the tremendous rush of the invisible. In the sweep of gales the sheltered dwelling stood in a calm resonant and disquieting, like the calm in the center of a hurricane. On stormy nights, when the tide was out, the bay of Fougère, fifty feet below the house, resembled an immense black

pit, from which ascended mutterings and sighs as if the sands down there had been alive and complaining. At high tide the returning water assaulted the ledges of rock in short rushes, ending in bursts of livid light and columns of spray, that flew inland, stinging to death the grass of pastures.

The darkness came from the hills, flowed over the coast, put out the red fires of sunset, and went on to seaward pursuing the retiring tide. The wind dropped with the sun, leaving a maddened sea and a devastated sky. The heavens above the house seemed to be draped in black rags, held up here and there by pins of fire. Madame Levaille, for this evening the servant of her own workmen, tried to induce them to depart. "An old woman like me ought to be in bed at this late hour," she good-humoredly repeated. The quarrymen drank, asked for more. They shouted over the table as if they had been talking across a field. At one end four of them played cards, banging the wood with their hard knuckles, and swearing at every lead. One sat with a lost gaze, humming a bar of some song, which he repeated endlessly. Two others, in a corner, were quarreling confidentially and fiercely over some woman, looking close into one another's eyes as if they had wanted to tear them out, but speaking in whispers that promised violence and murder discreetly, in a venomous sibillation of subdued words. The atmosphere in there was thick enough to slice with a knife. Three candles burning about the long room glowed red and dull like sparks expiring in ashes.

The slight click of the iron latch was at that late hour as unexpected and startling as a thunder-clap. Madame Levaille put down a bottle she held above a liqueur glass; the players turned their heads; the whispered quarrel ceased; only the singer, after darting a glance at the door,

went on humming with a stolid face. Susan appeared in the doorway, stepped in, flung the door to, and put her back against it, saying, half aloud—

"Mother!"

Madame Levaille, taking up the bottle again, said calmly: "Here you are, my girl. What a state you are in!" The neck of the bottle rang on the rim of the glass, for the old woman was startled, and the idea that the farm had caught fire had entered her head. She could think of no other cause for her daughter's appearance.

Susan, soaked and muddy, stared the whole length of the room towards the men at the far end. Her mother asked—

"What has happened? God guard us from misfortune!"

Susan moved her lips. No sound came. Madame Levaille stepped up to her daughter, took her by the arm, looked into her face.

"In God's name," she said, shakily, "what's the matter? You have been rolling in mud. . . . Why did you come? . . . Where's Jean?"

The men had all got up and approached slowly, staring with dull surprise. Madame Levaille jerked her daughter away from the door, swung her round upon a seat close to the wall. Then she turned fiercely to the men—

"Enough of this! Out you go—you others! I close."

One of them observed, looking down at Susan collapsed on the seat: "She is—one may say—half dead."

Madame Levaille flung the door open.

"Get out! March!" she cried, shaking nervously.

They dropped out into the night, laughing stupidly. Outside, the two Lotharios broke out into loud shouts. The others tried to soothe them, all talking at once. The noise went away up the lane with the men, who staggered

together in a tight knot, remonstrating with one another foolishly.

"Speak, Susan. What is it? Speak!" entreated Madame Levaille, as soon as the door was shut.

Susan pronounced some incomprehensible words, glaring at the table. The old woman clapped her hands above her head, let them drop, and stood looking at her daughter with disconsolate eyes. Her husband had been "deranged in his head" for a few years before he died, and now she began to suspect her daughter was going mad. She asked, pressingly—

"Does Jean know where you are? Where is Jean?"

Susan pronounced with difficulty—

"He knows . . . he is dead."

"What!" cried the old woman. She came up near, and peering at her daughter, repeated three times: "What do you say? What do you say? What do you say?"

Susan sat dry-eyed and stony before Madame Levaille, who contemplated her, feeling a strange sense of inexplicable horror creep into the silence of the house. She had hardly realized the news, further than to understand that she had been brought in one short moment face to face with something unexpected and final. It did not even occur to her to ask for any explanation. She thought: accident—terrible accident—blood to the head—fell down a trap door in the loft. . . . She remained there, distracted and mute, blinking her old eyes.

Suddenly, Susan said—

"I have killed him."

For a moment the mother stood still, almost unbreathing, but with composed face. The next second she burst out into a shout—

"You miserable madwoman . . . they will cut your neck. . . ."

She fancied the gendarmes entering the house, saying to her: "We want your daughter; give her up": the gendarmes with the severe, hard faces of men on duty. She knew the brigadier well—an old friend, familiar and respectful, saying heartily, "To your good health, Madame!" before lifting to his lips the small glass of cognac—out of the special bottle she kept for friends. And now! . . . She was losing her head. She rushed here and there, as if looking for something urgently needed—gave that up, stood stock still in the middle of the room, and screamed at her daughter—

"Why? Say! Say! Why?"

The other seemed to leap out of her strange apathy.

"Do you think I am made of stone?" she shouted back, striding towards her mother.

"No! It's impossible. . . ." said Madame Levaille, in a convinced tone.

"You go and see, mother," retorted Susan, looking at her with blazing eyes. "There's no mercy in heaven—no justice. No! . . . I did not know. . . . Do you think I have no heart? Do you think I have never heard people jeering at me, pitying me, wondering at me? Do you know how some of them were calling me? The mother of idiots—that was my nickname! And my children never would know me, never speak to me. They would know nothing; neither men—nor God. Haven't I prayed! But the Mother of God herself would not hear me. A mother! . . . Who is accursed—I, or the man who is dead? Eh? Tell me. I took care of myself. Do you think I would defy the anger of God and have my house full of those things—that are worse than animals who know the hand that feeds them? Who blasphemed in the night at the very church door? Was it I? . . . I only wept and prayed for mercy . . . and I feel the curse at every moment of the day—I see it

round me from morning to night . . . I've got to keep them alive—to take care of my misfortune and shame. And he would come. I begged him and Heaven for mercy. . . . No! . . . Then we shall see. . . . He came this evening. I thought to myself: 'Ah! again!' . . . I had my long scissors. I heard him shouting . . . I saw him near. . . . I must—must I? . . . Then take! . . . And I struck him in the throat above the breastbone. . . . I never heard him even sigh. . . . I left him standing. . . . It was a minute ago. How did I come here?"

Madame Levaille shivered. A wave of cold ran down her back, down her fat arms under her tight sleeves, made her stamp gently where she stood. Quivers ran over the broad cheeks, across the thin lips, ran amongst the wrinkles at the corners of her steady old eyes. She stammered—

"You wicked woman—you disgrace me. But there! You always resembled your father. What do you think will become of you . . . in the other world? In this . . . Oh, misery!"

She was very hot now. She felt burning inside. She wrung her perspiring hands—and suddenly, starting in great haste, began to look for her big shawl and umbrella, feverishly, never once glancing at her daughter, who stood in the middle of the room following her with a gaze distracted and cold.

"Nothing worse than in this," said Susan.

Her mother, umbrella in hand, and trailing the shawl over the floor, groaned profoundly.

"I must go to the priest," she burst out passionately. "I do not know whether you even speak the truth! You are a horrible woman. They will find you anywhere. You may stay here—or go. There is no room for you in this world."

Ready now to depart, she yet wandered aimlessly about

the room, putting the bottles on the shelf, trying to fit with trembling hands the covers on cardboard boxes. Whenever the real sense of what she had heard emerged for a second from the haze of her thoughts she would fancy that something had exploded in her brain without, unfortunately, bursting her head to pieces—which would have been a relief. She blew the candles out one by one without knowing it, and was horribly startled by the darkness. She fell on a bench and began to whimper. After a while she ceased, and sat listening to the breathing of her daughter, whom she could hardly see, still and upright, giving no other sign of life. She was becoming old rapidly at last, during those minutes. She spoke in tones unsteady, cut about by the rattle of teeth, like one shaken by a deadly cold fit of ague.

"I wish you had died little. I will never dare to show my old head in the sunshine again. There are worse misfortunes than idiot children. I wish you had been born to me simple—like your own. . . ."

She saw the figure of her daughter pass before the faint and livid clearness of a window. Then it appeared in the doorway for a second, and the door swung to with a clang. Madame Levaille, as if awakened by the noise from a long nightmare, rushed out.

"Susan!" she shouted from the doorstep.

She heard a stone roll a long time down the declivity of the rocky beach above the sands. She stepped forward cautiously, one hand on the wall of the house, and peered down into the smooth darkness of the empty bay. Once again she cried—

"Susan! You will kill yourself there."

The stone had taken its last leap in the dark, and she heard nothing now. A sudden thought seemed to strangle her, and she called no more. She turned her back upon the

black silence of the pit and went up the lane toward Ploumar, stumbling along with somber determination, as if she had started on a desperate journey that would last, perhaps, to the end of her life. A sullen and periodic clamor of waves rolling over reefs followed her far inland between the high hedges sheltering the gloomy solitude of the fields.

Susan had run out, swerving sharp to the left at the door, and on the edge of the slope crouched down behind a boulder. A dislodged stone went on downwards, rattling as it leaped. When Madame Levaille called out, Susan could have, by stretching her hand, touched her mother's skirt, had she had the courage to move a limb. She saw the old woman go away, and she remained still, closing her eyes and pressing her side to the hard and rugged surface of the rock. After a while a familiar face with fixed eyes and an open mouth became visible in the intense obscurity amongst the boulders. She uttered a low cry and stood up. The face vanished, leaving her to gasp and shiver alone in the wilderness of stone heaps. But as soon as she had crouched down again to rest, with her head against the rock, the face returned, came very near, appeared eager to finish the speech that had been cut short by death, only a moment ago. She scrambled quickly to her feet and said: "Go away, or I will do it again." The thing wavered, swung to the right, to the left. She moved this way and that, stepped back, fancied herself screaming at it, and was appalled by the unbroken stillness of the night. She tottered on the brink, felt the steep declivity under her feet, and rushed down blindly to save herself from a headlong fall. The shingle seemed to wake up; the pebbles began to roll before her, pursued her from above, raced down with her on both sides, rolling past with an increasing clatter. In the peace of the night the noise

grew, deepening to a rumor, continuous and violent, as if the whole semicircle of the stony beach had started to tumble down into the bay. Susan's feet hardly touched the slope that seemed to run down with her. At the bottom she stumbled, shot forward, throwing her arms out, and fell heavily. She jumped up at once and turned swiftly to look back, her clenched hands full of sand she had clutched in her fall. The face was there, keeping its distance, visible in its own sheen that made a pale stain in the night. She shouted, "Go away!"—she shouted at it with pain, with fear, with all the rage of that useless stab that could not keep him quiet, keep him out of her sight. What did he want now? He was dead. Dead men have no children. Would he never leave her alone? She shrieked at it—waved her outstretched hands. She seemed to feel the breath of parted lips, and, with a long cry of discouragement, fled across the level bottom of the bay.

She ran lightly, unaware of any effort of her body. High sharp rocks that, when the bay is full, show above the glittering plain of blue water like pointed towers of submerged churches, glided past her, rushing to the land at a tremendous pace. To the left, in the distance, she could see something shining: a broad disc of light in which narrow shadows pivoted round the center like the spokes of a wheel. She heard a voice calling, "Hey! There!" and answered with a wild scream. So, he could call yet! He was calling after her to stop. Never! . . . She tore through the night, past the startled group of seaweed-gatherers who stood round their lantern paralyzed with fear at the unearthly screech coming from that fleeing shadow. The men leaned on their pitchforks staring fearfully. A woman fell on her knees, and, crossing herself, began to pray aloud. A little girl with her ragged skirt full of slimy seaweed began to sob despairingly, lugging her

soaked burden close to the man who carried the light. Somebody said: "The thing ran out towards the sea." Another voice exclaimed: "And the sea is coming back! Look at the spreading puddles. Do you hear—you woman—there! Get up!" Several voices cried together. "Yes, let us be off! Let the accursed thing go to the sea!" They moved on, keeping close round the light. Suddenly a man swore loudly. He would go and see what was the matter. It had been a woman's voice. He would go. There were shrill protests from women—but his high form detached itself from the group and went off running. They sent an unanimous call of scared voices after him. A word, insulting and mocking, came back, thrown at them through darkness. A woman moaned. An old man said gravely: "Such things ought to be left alone." They went on slower, shuffling in the yielding sand and whispering to one another that Millot feared nothing, having no religion, but that it would end badly some day.

Susan met the incoming tide by the Raven islet and stopped, panting, with her feet in the water. She heard the murmur and felt the cold caress of the sea, and, calmer now, could see the somber and confused mass of the Raven on one side and on the other the long white streak of Molène sands that are left high above the dry bottom of Fougère Bay at every ebb. She turned round and saw far away, along the starred background of the sky, the ragged outline of the coast. Above it, nearly facing her, appeared the tower of Ploumar Church; a slender and tall pyramid shooting up dark and pointed into the clustered glitter of the stars. She felt strangely calm. She knew where she was, and began to remember how she came there —and why. She peered into the smooth obscurity near her. She was alone. There was nothing there; nothing near her, either living or dead.

The tide was creeping in quietly, putting out long impatient arms of strange rivulets that ran towards the land between ridges of sand. Under the night the pools grew bigger with mysterious rapidity, while the great sea, yet far off, thundered in a regular rhythm along the indistinct line of the horizon. Susan splashed her way back for a few yards without being able to get clear of the water that murmured tenderly all around and, suddenly, with a spiteful gurgle, nearly took her off her feet. Her heart thumped with fear. This place was too big and too empty to die in. Tomorrow they would do with her what they liked. But before she died she must tell them—tell the gentleman in black clothes that there are things no woman can bear. She must explain how it happened. . . . She splashed through a pool, getting wet to the waist, too preoccupied to care. . . . She must explain. "He came in the same way as ever and said, just so: 'Do you think I am going to leave the land to those people from Morbihan that I do not know? Do you? We shall see! Come along, you creature of mischance!' And he put his arms out. Then, Messieurs, I said: 'Before God—never!' And he said, striding at me with open palms: 'There is no God to hold me! Do you understand, you useless carcass! I will do what I like.' And he took me by the shoulders. Then I, Messieurs, called to God for help, and next minute, while he was shaking me, I felt my long scissors in my hand. His shirt was unbuttoned, and, by the candlelight, I saw the hollow of his throat. I cried: 'Let go!' He was crushing my shoulders. He was strong, my man was! Then I thought: No! . . . Must I? . . . Then take!—and I struck in the hollow place. I never saw him fall. Never! Never! . . . Never saw him fall. . . . The old father never turned his head. He is deaf and childish, gentle-

men. . . . Nobody saw him fall. I ran out . . . Nobody saw . . ."

She had been scrambling amongst the boulders of the Raven and now found herself, all out of breath, standing amongst the heavy shadows of the rocky islet. The Raven is connected with the mainland by a natural pier of immense and slippery stones. She intended to return home that way. Was he still standing there? At home. Home! Four idiots and a corpse. She must go back and explain. Anybody would understand. . . .

Below her the night or the sea seemed to pronounce distinctly—

"Aha! I see you at last!"

She started, slipped, fell; and without attempting to rise, listened, terrified. She heard heavy breathing, a clatter of wooden clogs. It stopped.

"Where the devil did you pass?" said an invisible man, hoarsely.

She held her breath. She recognized the voice. She had not seen him fall. Was he pursuing her there dead, or perhaps . . . alive?

She lost her head. She cried from the crevice where she lay huddled, "Never, never!"

"Ah! You are still there. You led me a fine dance. Wait, my beauty, I must see how you look after all this. You wait. . . ."

Millot was stumbling, laughing, swearing meaninglessly out of pure satisfaction, pleased with himself for having run down that fly-by-night. "As if there were such things as ghosts! Bah! It took an old African soldier to show those clodhoppers. . . . But it was curious. Who the devil was she?"

Susan listened, crouching. He was coming for her, this dead man. There was no escape. What a noise he made

amongst the stones. . . . She saw his head rise up, then the shoulders. He was tall—her own man! His long arms waved about, and it was his own voice sounding a little strange . . . because of the scissors. She scrambled out quickly, rushed to the edge of the causeway, and turned round. The man stood still on a high stone, detaching himself in dead black on the glitter of the sky.

"Where are you going to?" he called, roughly.

She answered, "Home!" and watched him intensely. He made a striding, clumsy leap on to another boulder, and stopped again, balancing himself, then said—

"Ha! ha! Well, I am going with you. It's the least I can do. Ha! ha! ha!"

She stared at him till her eyes seemed to become glowing coals that burned deep into her brain, and yet she was in mortal fear of making out the well-known features. Below her the sea lapped softly against the rock with a splash continuous and gentle.

The man said, advancing another step—

"I am coming for you. What do you think?"

She trembled. Coming for her! There was no escape, no peace, no hope. She looked round despairingly. Suddenly the whole shadowy coast, the blurred islets, the heaven itself, swayed about twice, then came to a rest. She closed her eyes and shouted—

"Can't you wait till I am dead!"

She was shaken by a furious hate for that shade that pursued her in this world, unappeased even by death in its longing for an heir that would be like other people's children.

"Hey! What?" said Millot, keeping his distance prudently. He was saying to himself: "Look out! Some lunatic. An accident happens soon."

She went on, wildly—

"I want to live. To live alone—for a week—for a day. I must explain to them. . . . I would tear you to pieces, I would kill you twenty times over rather than let you touch me while I live. How many times must I kill you—you blasphemer! Satan sends you here. I am damned too!"

"Come," said Millot, alarmed and conciliating. "I am perfectly alive! . . . Oh, my God!"

She had screamed, "Alive!" and at once vanished before his eyes, as if the islet itself had swerved aside from under her feet. Millot rushed forward, and fell flat with his chin over the edge. Far below he saw the water whitened by her struggles, and heard one shrill cry for help that seemed to dart upwards along the perpendicular face of the rock, and soar past, straight into the high and impassive heaven.

Madame Levaille sat, dry-eyed, on the short grass of the hill side, with her thick legs stretched out, and her old feet turned up in their black cloth shoes. Her clogs stood near by, and further off the umbrella lay on the withered sward like a weapon dropped from the grasp of a vanquished warrior. The Marquis of Chavanes, on horseback, one gloved hand on thigh, looked down at her as she got up laboriously, with groans. On the narrow track of the seaweed-carts four men were carrying inland Susan's body on a handbarrow, while several others straggled listlessly behind. Madame Levaille looked after the procession. "Yes, Monsieur le Marquis," she said dispassionately, in her usual calm tone of a reasonable old woman. "There are unfortunate people on this earth. I had only one child. Only one! And they won't bury her in consecrated ground!"

Her eyes filled suddenly, and a short shower of tears

rolled down the broad cheeks. She pulled the shawl close about her. The Marquis leaned slightly over in his saddle, and said—

"It is very sad. You have all my sympathy. I shall speak to the Curé. She was unquestionably insane, and the fall was accidental. Millot says so distinctly. Good-day, Madame."

And he trotted off, thinking to himself: "I must get this old woman appointed guardian of those idiots, and administrator of the farm. It would be much better than having here one of those other Bacadous, probably a red republican, corrupting my commune."

THE LOST PHOEBE [1]

by THEODORE DREISER
(1871– 1945)

THEODORE DREISER was born in Indiana in 1871. He received his education at Indiana University. By turns he was newspaper reporter and magazine editor, being for three years editor-in-chief of the Butterick publications. At last he turned definitely to writing and has the reputation of being a powerful writer of realistic and naturalistic fiction. Among his books are *Sister Carrie, Jennie Gerhardt, The Financier, A Book About Myself, An American Tragedy,* and *Free and Other Stories.*

THEY lived together in a part of the country which was not so prosperous as it had once been, about three miles from one of those small towns that, instead of increasing in population, is steadily decreasing. The territory was not very thickly settled; perhaps a house every other mile or so, with large areas of corn- and wheat-land and fallow fields that at odd seasons had been sown to timothy and clover. Their particular house was part log and part frame, the log portion being the old original home of Henry's grandfather. The new portion, of now rain-beaten, time-worn slabs, through which the wind squeaked in the chinks at times, and which several overshadowing elms and a butternut tree made picturesque and reminiscently pathetic, but a little damp, was erected by Henry when he was twenty-one and just married.

That was forty-eight years before. The furniture in-

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side, like the house outside, was old and mildewy and reminiscent of an earlier day. You have seen the what-not of cherry wood, perhaps, with spiral legs and fluted top. It was there. The old-fashioned four poster bed, with its ball-like protuberances and deep curving incisions, was there also, a sadly alienated descendant of an early Jacobean ancestor. The bureau of cherry was also high and wide and solidly built, but faded-looking, and with a musty odor. The rag carpet that underlay all these sturdy examples of enduring furniture was a weak, faded, lead-and-pink-colored affair woven by Phoebe Ann's own hands, when she was fifteen years younger than she was when she died. The creaky wooden loom on which it had been done now stood like a dusty, bony skeleton, along with a broken rocking-chair, a worm-eaten clothes-press—Heaven knows how old—a lime-stained bench that had once been used to keep flowers on outside the door, and other decrepit factors of household utility, in an east room that was a lean-to against this so-called main portion. All sorts of other broken-down furniture were about this place; an antiquated clothes-horse, cracked in two of its ribs; a broken mirror in an old cherry frame, which had fallen from a nail and cracked itself three days before their youngest son, Jerry, died; an extension hat-rack, which once had had porcelain knobs on the ends of its pegs; and a sewing-machine, long since outdone in its clumsy mechanism by rivals of a newer generation.

The orchard to the east of the house was full of gnarled old apple-trees, worm-eaten as to trunks and branches, and fully ornamented with green and white lichens, so that it had a sad, greenish-white, silvery effect in moonlight. The low outhouses, which had once housed chickens, a horse or two, a cow, and several pigs, were covered with patches of moss as to their roof, and the sides had been

free of paint for so long that they were blackish gray as to color, and a little spongy. The picket-fence in front, with its gate squeaky and askew, and the side fences of the stake-and-rider type were in an equally run-down condition. As a matter of fact, they had aged synchronously with the persons who lived here, old Henry Reifsneider and his wife Phoebe Ann.

They had lived here, these two, ever since their marriage, forty-eight years before, and Henry had lived here before that from his childhood up. His father and mother, well along in years when he was a boy, had invited him to bring his wife here when he had first fallen in love and decided to marry; and he had done so. His father and mother were the companions of himself and his wife for ten years after they were married, when both died; and then Henry and Phoebe were left with their five children growing lustily apace. But all sorts of things had happened since then. Of the seven children, all told, that had been born to them, three had died; one girl had gone to Kansas; one boy had gone to Sioux Falls, never even to be heard of after; another boy had gone to Washington; and the last girl lived five counties away in the same State, but was so burdened with cares of her own that she rarely gave them a thought. Time and a commonplace home life that had never been attractive had weaned them thoroughly, so that, wherever they were, they gave little thought as to how it might be with their father and mother.

Old Henry Reifsneider and his wife Phoebe were a loving couple. You perhaps know how it is with simple natures that fasten themselves like lichens on the stones of circumstance and weather their days to a crumbling conclusion. The great world sounds widely, but it has no call for them. They have no soaring intellect. The orchard,

the meadow, the cornfield, the pig-pen, and the chicken-lot measure the range of their human activities. When the wheat is headed it is reaped and threshed; when the corn is browned and frosted it is cut and shocked; when the timothy is in full head it is cut, and the hay-cock erected. After that comes winter, with the hauling of grain to market, the sawing and splitting of wood, the simple chores of fire-building, meal-getting, occasional repairing, and visiting. Beyond these and the changes of weather—the snows, the rains, and the fair days—there are no immediate, significant things. All the rest of life is a far-off, clamorous phantasmagoria, flickering like Northern lights in the night, and sounding as faintly as cow-bells tinkling in the distance.

Old Henry and his wife Phoebe were as fond of each other as it is possible for two old people to be who have nothing else in this life to be fond of. He was a thin old man, seventy when she died, a queer, crotchety person with coarse gray-black hair and beard, quite straggly and unkempt. He looked at you out of dull, fishy, watery eyes that had deep-brown crow's-feet at the sides. His clothes, like the clothes of many farmers, were aged and angular and baggy, standing out at the pockets, not fitting about the neck, protuberant and worn at elbow and knee. Phoebe Ann was thin and shapeless, a very umbrella of a woman, clad in shabby black, and with a black bonnet for her best wear. As time had passed, and they had only themselves to look after, their movements had become slower and slower, their activities fewer and fewer. The annual keep of pigs had been reduced from five to one grunting porker, and the single horse which Henry now retained was a sleepy animal, not over-nourished and not very clean. The chickens, of which formerly there was a large flock, had almost disappeared, owing to ferrets, foxes, and the lack

of proper care, which produces disease. The former healthy garden was now a straggling memory of itself, and the vines and flower-beds that formerly ornamented the windows and dooryard had now become choking thickets. A will had been made which divided the small tax-eaten property equally among the remaining four, so that it was really of no interest to any of them. Yet these two lived together in peace and sympathy, only that now and then old Henry would become unduly cranky, complaining almost invariably that something had been neglected or mislaid which was of no importance at all.

"Phoebe, where's my corn knife? You ain't never minded to let my things alone no more."

"Now you hush, Henry," his wife would caution him in a cracked and squeaky voice. "If you don't, I'll leave yuh. I'll git up and walk out of here some day, and then where would y' be? Y' ain't got anybody but me to look after yuh, so yuh just behave yourself. Your corn knife's on the mantel where it's allus been unless you've gone an' put it summers else."

Old Henry, who knew his wife would never leave him in any circumstances, used to speculate at times as to what he would do if she were to die. That was the one leaving that he really feared. As he climbed on the chair at night to wind the old, long-pendulumed, double-weighted clock, or went finally to the front and the back door to see that they were safely shut in, it was a comfort to know that Phoebe was there, properly ensconced on her side of the bed, and that if he stirred restlessly in the night, she would be there to ask what he wanted.

"Now, Henry, do lie still! You're as restless as a chicken."

"Well, I can't sleep, Phoebe."

"Well, yuh needn't roll so, anyhow. Yuh kin let me sleep."

This usually reduced him to a state of somnolent ease. If she wanted a pail of water, it was a grumbling pleasure for him to get it; and if she did rise first to build the fires, he saw that the wood was cut and placed within easy reach. They divided this simple world nicely between them.

As the years had gone on, however, fewer and fewer people had called. They were well-known for a distance of as much as ten square miles as old Mr. and Mrs. Reifsneider, honest, moderately Christian, but too old to be really interesting any longer. The writing of letters had become an almost impossible burden too difficult to continue or even negotiate via others, although an occasional letter still did arrive from the daughter in Pemberton County. Now and then some old friend stopped with a pie or cake or a roasted chicken or duck, or merely to see that they were well; but even these kindly-minded visits were no longer frequent.

One day in the early spring of her sixty-fourth year Mrs. Reifsneider took sick, and from a low fever passed into some indefinable ailment which, because of her age, was no longer curable. Old Henry drove to Swinnerton, the neighboring town, and procured a doctor. Some friends called, and the immediate care of her was taken off his hands. Then one chill spring night she died, and old Henry, in a fog of sorrow and uncertainty, followed her body to the nearest graveyard, an unattractive space with a few pines growing in it. Although he might have gone to the daughter in Pemberton or sent for her, it was really too much trouble and he was too weary and fixed. It was suggested to him at once by one friend and another that he come to stay with them awhile, but he did

not see fit. He was so old and so fixed in his notions and so accustomed to the exact surroundings he had known all his days, that he could not think of leaving. He wanted to remain near where they had put his Phoebe; and the fact that he would have to live alone did not trouble him in the least. The living children were notified and the care of him offered if he would leave, but he would not.

"I kin make a shift for myself," he continually announced to old Dr. Morrow, who had attended his wife in this case. "I kin cook a little, and, besides, it don't take much more'n coffee an' bread in the mornin's to satisfy me. I'll get along now well enough. Yuh just let me be." And after many pleadings and proffers of advice, with supplies of coffee and bacon and baked bread duly offered and accepted, he was left to himself. For a while he sat idly outside his door brooding in the spring sun. He tried to revive his interest in farming, and to keep himself busy and free from thought by looking after the fields, which of late had been much neglected. It was a gloomy thing to come in of an evening, however, or in the afternoon and find no shadow of Phoebe where everything suggested her. By degrees he put a few of her things away. At night he sat beside his lamp and read in the papers that were left him occasionally or in a Bible that he had neglected for years, but he could get little solace from these things. Mostly he held his hand over his mouth and looked at the floor as he sat and thought of what had become of her, and how soon he himself would die. He made a great business of making his coffee in the morning and frying himself a little bacon at night; but his appetite was gone. The shell in which he had been housed so long seemed vacant, and its shadows were suggestive of immedicable griefs. So he lived quite dolefully for five long months, and then a change began.

It was one night, after he had looked after the front and the back door, wound the clock, blown out the light, and gone through all the selfsame motions that he had indulged in for years, that he went to bed not so much to sleep as to think. It was a moonlight night. The green-lichen-covered orchard just outside and to be seen from his bed where he now lay was a silvery affair, sweetly spectral. The moon shone through the east windows, throwing the pattern of the panes on the wooden floor, and making the old furniture, to which he was accustomed, stand out dimly in the room. As usual he had been thinking of Phoebe and the years when they had been young together, and of the children who had gone, and the poor shift he was making of his present days. The house was coming to be in a very bad state indeed. The bed-clothes were in disorder and not clean, for he made a wretched shift of washing. It was a terror to him. The roof leaked, causing things, some of them, to remain damp for weeks at a time, but he was getting into that brooding state where he would accept anything rather than exert himself. He preferred to pace slowly to and fro or to sit and think.

By twelve o'clock of this particular night he was asleep, however, and by two had waked again. The moon by this time had shifted to a position on the western side of the house, and it now shone in through the windows of the living-room and those of the kitchen beyond. A certain combination of furniture—a chair near a table, with his coat on it, the half-open kitchen door casting a shadow, and the position of a lamp near a paper—gave him an exact representation of Phoebe leaning over the table as he had often seen her do in life. It gave him a great start. Could it be she—or her ghost? He had scarcely ever believed in spirits; and still— He looked at her fixedly in the feeble half-light, his old hair tingling oddly at the

roots, and then sat up. The figure did not move. He put his thin legs out of the bed and sat looking at her, wondering if this could really be Phoebe. They had talked of ghosts often in their lifetime, of apparitions and omens; but they had never agreed that such things could be. It had never been a part of his wife's creed that she could have a spirit that could return to walk the earth. Her after-world was quite a different affair, a vague heaven, no less, from which the righteous did not trouble to return. Yet here she was now, bending over the table in her black skirt and gray shawl, her pale profile outlined against the moonlight.

"Phoebe," he called, thrilling from head to toe and putting out one bony hand, "have yuh come back?"

The figure did not stir, and he arose and walked uncertainly to the door, looking at it fixedly the while. As he drew near, however, the apparition resolved itself into its primal content—his old coat over the high-backed chair, the lamp by the paper, the half-open door.

"Well," he said to himself, his mouth open, "I thought shore I saw her." And he ran his hand strangely and vaguely through his hair, the while his nervous tension relaxed. Vanished as it had, it gave him the idea that she might return.

Another night, because of this first illusion, and because his mind was now constantly on her and he was old, he looked out of the window that was nearest his bed and commanded a hen-coop and pig-pen and a part of the wagon-shed, and there, a faint mist exuding from the damp of the ground, he thought he saw her again. It was one of those little wisps of mist, one of those faint exhalations of the earth that rise in a cool night after a warm day, and flicker like small white cypresses of fog before they disappear. In life it had been a custom of hers to

cross this lot from her kitchen door to the pig-pen to throw in any scrap that was left from her cooking, and here she was again. He sat up and watched it strangely, doubtfully, because of his previous experience, but inclined, because of the nervous titillation that passed over his body, to believe that spirits really were, and that Phoebe, who would be concerned because of his lonely state, must be thinking about him, and hence returning. What other way would she have? How otherwise could she express herself? It would be within the province of her charity so to do, and like her loving interest in him. He quivered and watched it eagerly; but, a faint breath of air stirring, it wound away toward the fence and disappeared.

A third night, as he was actually dreaming, some ten days later, she came to his bedside and put her hand on his head.

"Poor Henry!" she said. "It's too bad."

He roused out of his sleep, actually to see her, he thought, moving from his bed-room into the one living-room, her figure a shadowy mass of black. The weak straining of his eyes caused little points of light to flicker about the outlines of her form. He arose, greatly astonished, walked the floor in the cool room, convinced that Phoebe was coming back to him. If he only thought sufficiently, if he made it perfectly clear by his feeling that he needed her greatly, she would come back, this kindly wife, and tell him what to do. She would perhaps be with him much of the time, in the night, anyhow; and that would make him less lonely, this state more endurable.

In age and with the feeble it is not such a far cry from the subtleties of illusion to actual hallucination, and in due time this transition was made for Henry. Night after night he waited, expecting her return. Once in his weird

mood he thought he saw a pale light moving about the room, and another time he thought he saw her walking in the orchard after dark. It was one morning when the details of his lonely state were virtually unendurable that he woke with the thought that she was not dead. How he had arrived at this conclusion it is hard to say. His mind had gone. In its place was a fixed illusion. He and Phoebe had had a senseless quarrel. He had reproached her for not leaving his pipe where he was accustomed to find it, and she had left. It was an aberrated fulfillment of her old jesting threat that if he did not behave himself she would leave him.

"I guess I could find yuh ag'in," he had always said. But her cackling threat had always been:

"Yuh'll not find me if I ever leave yuh. I guess I kin git some place where yuh can't find me."

This morning when he arose he did not think to build the fire in the customary way or to grind his coffee and cut his bread, as was his wont, but solely to meditate as to where he should search for her and how he should induce her to come back. Recently the one horse had been dispensed with because he found it cumbersome and beyond his needs. He took down his soft crush hat after he had dressed himself, a new glint of interest and determination in his eye, and taking his black crook cane from behind the door, where he had always placed it, started out briskly to look for her among the nearest neighbors. His old shoes clumped soundly in the dust as he walked, and his gray-black locks, now grown rather long, straggled out in a dramatic fringe or halo from under his hat. His short coat stirred busily as he walked, and his hands and face were peaked and pale.

"Why, hello, Henry! Where're yuh goin' this morn-

in'?" inquired Farmer Dodge, who, hauling a load of wheat to market, encountered him on the public road. He had not seen the aged farmer in months, not since his wife's death, and he wondered now, seeing him looking so spry.

"Yuh ain't seen Phoebe, have yuh?" inquired the old man, looking up quizzically.

"Phoebe who?" inquired Farmer Dodge, not for the moment connecting the name with Henry's dead wife.

"Why, my wife Phoebe, o' course. Who do yuh s'pose I mean?" He stared up with a pathetic sharpness of glance from under his shaggy, gray eyebrows.

"Wall, I'll swan, Henry, yuh ain't jokin', are yuh?" said the solid Dodge, a pursy man, with a smooth, hard, red face. "It can't be your wife yuh're talkin' about. She's dead."

"Dead! Shucks!" retorted the demented Reifsneider. "She left me early this mornin', while I was sleepin'. She allus got up to build the fire, but she's gone now. We had a little spat last night, an' I guess that's the reason. But I guess I kin find her. She's gone over to Matilda Race's; that's where she's gone."

He started briskly up the road, leaving the amazed Dodge to stare in wonder after him.

"Well, I'll be switched!" he said aloud to himself. "He's clean out'n his head. That poor old feller's been livin' down there till he's gone out'n his mind. I'll have to notify the authorities." And he flicked his whip with great enthusiasm. "Geddap!" he said, and was off.

Reifsneider met no one else in this poorly populated region until he reached the whitewashed fence of Matilda Race and her husband three miles away. He had passed several other houses en route, but these not being within the range of his illusion were not considered. His wife,

who had known Matilda well, must be here. He opened the picket-gate which guarded the walk, and stamped briskly up to the door.

"Why, Mr. Reifsneider," exclaimed old Matilda herself, a stout woman, looking out of the door in answer to his knock, "what brings yuh here this mornin'?"

"Is Phoebe here?" he demanded eagerly.

"Phoebe who? What Phoebe?" replied Mrs. Race, curious as to this sudden development of energy on his part.

"Why, my Phoebe, o' course. My wife Phoebe. Who do yuh s'pose? Ain't she here now?"

"Lawsy me!" exclaimed Mrs. Race, opening her mouth. "Yuh pore man! So you're clean out'n your mind now. Yuh come right in and sit down. I'll git yuh a cup o' coffee. O' course your wife ain't here; but yuh come in an' sit down. I'll find her fer yuh after a while. I know where she is."

The old farmer's eyes softened, and he entered. He was so thin and pale a specimen, pantalooned and patriarchal, that he aroused Mrs. Race's extremest sympathy as he took off his hat and laid it on his knees quite softly and mildly.

"We had a quarrel last night, an' she left me," he volunteered.

"Laws! laws!" sighed Mrs. Race, there being no one present with whom to share her astonishment as she went to her kitchen. "The pore man! Now somebody's just got to look after him. He can't be allowed to run around the country this way lookin' for his dead wife. It's turrible."

She boiled him a pot of coffee and brought in some of her new-baked bread and fresh butter. She set out some of her best jam and put a couple of eggs to boil, lying whole-heartedly the while.

"Now yuh stay right there, Uncle Henry, till Jake

comes in, an' I'll send him to look for Phoebe. I think it's more'n likely she's over to Swinnerton with some o' her friends. Anyhow, we'll find out. Now yuh just drink this coffee an' eat this bread. Yuh must be tired. Yuh've had a long walk this mornin'." Her idea was to take counsel with Jake, her man, and perhaps have him notify the authorities.

She bustled about, meditating on the uncertainties of life, while old Reifsneider thrummed on the rim of his hat with his pale fingers and later ate abstractedly of what she offered. His mind was on his wife, however, and since she was not here, or did not appear, it wandered vaguely away to a family by the name of Murray, miles away in another direction. He decided after a time that he would not wait for Jake Race to hunt his wife but would seek her for himself. He must be on, and urge her to come back.

"Well, I'll be goin'," he said, getting up and looking strangely about him. "I guess she didn't come here after all. She went over to the Murrays', I guess. I'll not wait any longer, Mis' Race. There's a lot to do over to the house today." And out he marched in the face of her protests, taking to the dusty road again in the warm spring sun, his cane striking the earth as he went.

It was two hours later that this pale figure of a man appeared in the Murrays' doorway, dusty, perspiring, eager. He had tramped all of five miles, and it was noon. An amazed husband and wife of sixty heard his strange query, and realized also that he was mad. They begged him to stay to dinner, intending to notify the authorities later and see what could be done; but though he stayed to partake of a little something, he did not stay long, and was off again to another distant farmhouse, his idea of many things to do and his need of Phoebe impelling

him. So it went for that day and the next and the next, the circle of his inquiry ever widening.

The process by which a character assumes the significance of being peculiar, his antics weird, yet harmless, in such a community, is often involute and pathetic. This day, as has been said, saw Reifsneider at other doors, eagerly asking his unnatural question, and leaving a trail of amazement, sympathy, and pity in his wake. Although the authorities were informed—the county sheriff, no less—it was not deemed advisable to take him into custody; for when those who knew old Henry, and had for so long, reflected on the condition of the county insane asylum, a place which, because of the poverty of the district, was of staggering aberration and sickening environment, it was decided to let him remain at large; for, strange to relate, it was found on investigation that at night he returned peaceably enough to his lonesome domicile, there to discover whether his wife had returned, and to brood in loneliness until the morning. Who would lock up a thin, eager, seeking old man with iron-gray hair and an attitude of kindly, innocent inquiry, particularly when he was well known for a past of only kindly servitude and reliability? Those who had known him best rather agreed that he should be allowed to roam at large. He could do no harm. There were many who were willing to help him as to food, old clothes, the odds and ends of his daily life—at least at first. His figure after a time became not so much a commonplace as an accepted curiosity, and the replies, "Why, no, Henry; I ain't seen her," or "No, Henry; she ain't been here today," more customary.

For several years thereafter then he was an odd figure in the sun and rain, on dusty roads and muddy ones, encountered occasionally in strange and unexpected places, pursuing his endless search. Undernourishment, after a

time, although the neighbors and those who knew his history gladly contributed from their store, affected his body; for he walked much and ate little. The longer he roamed the public highway in this manner, the deeper became his strange hallucination; and finding it harder and harder to return from his more and more distant pilgrimages, he finally began taking a few utensils with him from his home, making a small package of them, in order that he might not be compelled to return. In an old tin coffee-pot of large size he placed a small tin cup, a knife, fork, and spoon, some salt and pepper, and to the outside of it, by a string forced through a pierced hole, he fastened a plate, which could be released, and which was his woodland table. It was no trouble for him to secure the little food that he needed, and with a strange, almost religious dignity, he had no hesitation in asking for that much. By degrees his hair became longer and longer, his once black hat became an earthen brown, and his clothes threadbare and dusty.

For all of three years he walked, and none knew how wide were his perambulations, nor how he survived the storms and cold. They could not see him, with homely rural understanding and forethought, sheltering himself in hay-cocks, or by the sides of cattle, whose warm bodies protected him from the cold, and whose dull understandings were not opposed to his harmless presence. Overhanging rocks and trees kept him at times from the rain, and a friendly hay-loft or corn-crib was not above his humble consideration.

The involute progression of hallucination is strange. From asking at doors and being constantly rebuffed or denied, he finally came to the conclusion that although his Phoebe might not be in any of the houses at the doors of which he inquired, she might nevertheless be within the

sound of his voice. And so, from patient inquiry, he began to call sad, occasional cries, that ever and anon waked the quiet landscapes and ragged hill regions, and set to echoing his thin "O-o-o Phoebe! O-o-o Phoebe!" It had a pathetic, albeit insane, ring, and many a farmer or plowboy came to know it even from afar and say, "There goes old Reifsneider."

Another thing that puzzled him greatly after a time and after many hundreds of inquiries was, when he no longer had any particular dooryard in view and no special inquiry to make, which way to go. These cross-roads, which occasionally led in four or even six directions, came after a time to puzzle him. But to solve this knotty problem, which became more and more of a puzzle, there came to his aid another hallucination. Phoebe's spirit or some power of the air or wind or nature would tell him. If he stood at the center of the parting of the ways, closed his eyes, turned thrice about, and called "O-o-o Phoebe!" twice, and then threw his cane straight before him, that would surely indicate which way to go for Phoebe, or one of these mystic powers would surely govern its direction and fall! In whichever direction it went, even though, as was not infrequently the case, it took him back along the path he had already come, or across fields, he was not so far gone in his mind but that he gave himself ample time to search before he called again. Also the hallucination seemed to persist that at some time he would surely find her. There were hours when his feet were sore, and his limbs weary, when he would stop in the heat to wipe his seamed brow, or in the cold to beat his arms. Sometimes, after throwing away his cane, and finding it indicating the direction from which he had just come, he would shake his head wearily and philosophically, as if contemplating the unbelievable or an untoward fate, and then start

briskly off. His strange figure came finally to be known in the farthest reaches of three or four counties. Old Reifsneider was a pathetic character. His fame was wide.

Near a little town called Watersville, in Green County, perhaps four miles from that minor center of human activity, there was a place or precipice locally known as the Red Cliff, a sheer wall of red sandstone, perhaps a hundred feet high, which raised its sharp face for half a mile or more above the fruitful cornfields and orchards that lay beneath, and which was surmounted by a thick growth of trees. The slope that slowly led up to it from the opposite side was covered by a rank growth of beech, hickory, and ash, through which threaded a number of wagon-tracks crossing at various angles. In fair weather it had become old Reifsneider's habit, so inured was he by now to the open, to make his bed in some such patch of trees as this, to fry his bacon or boil his eggs at the foot of some tree before laying himself down for the night. Occasionally, so light and inconsequential was his sleep, he would walk at night. More often, the moonlight or some sudden wind stirring in the trees or a reconnoitering animal arousing him, he would sit up and think, or pursue his quest in the moonlight or the dark, a strange, unnatural, half wild, half savage-looking but utterly harmless creature, calling at lonely road crossings, staring at dark and shuttered houses, and wondering where, where Phoebe could really be.

That particular lull that comes in the systole-diastole of this earthly ball at two o'clock in the morning invariably aroused him, and though he might not go any farther he would sit up and contemplate the darkness or the stars, wondering. Sometimes in the strange processes of his mind he would fancy that he saw moving among the trees the figure of his lost wife, and then he would get

up to follow, taking his utensils, always on a string, and his cane. If she seemed to evade him too easily he would run, or plead, or, suddenly losing track of the fancied figure, stand awed or disappointed, grieving for the moment over the almost insurmountable difficulties of his search.

It was in the seventh year of these hopeless peregrinations, in the dawn of a similar springtime to that in which his wife had died, that he came at last one night to the vicinity of this self-same patch that crowned the rise to the Red Cliff. His far-flung cane, used as a divining-rod at the last cross-roads, had brought him hither. He had walked many, many miles. It was after ten o'clock at night, and he was very weary. Long wandering and little eating had left him but a shadow of his former self. It was a question now not so much of physical strength but of spiritual endurance which kept him up. He had scarcely eaten this day, and now exhausted he set himself down in the dark to rest and possibly to sleep.

Curiously on this occasion a strange suggestion of the presence of his wife surrounded him. It would not be long now, he counseled with himself, although the long months had brought him nothing, until he should see her, talk to her. He fell asleep after a time, his head on his knees. At midnight the moon began to rise, and at two in the morning, his wakeful hour, was a large silver disk shining through the trees to the east. He opened his eyes when the radiance became strong, making a silver pattern at his feet and lighting the woods with strange lusters and silvery, shadowy forms. As usual, his old notion that his wife must be near occurred to him on this occasion, and he looked about him with a speculative, anticipatory eye. What was it that moved in the distant shadows along the path by which he had entered—a pale, flickering will-o'-

the-wisp that bobbed gracefully among the trees and riveted his expectant gaze? Moonlight and shadows combined to give it a strange form and a stranger reality, this fluttering of bog-fire or dancing of wandering fire-flies. Was it truly his lost Phoebe? By a circuitous route it passed about him, and in his fevered state he fancied that he could see the very eyes of her, not as she was when he last saw her in the black dress and shawl but now a strangely younger Phoebe, gayer, sweeter, the one whom he had known years before as a girl. Old Reifsneider got up. He had been expecting and dreaming of this hour all these years, and now as he saw the feeble light dancing lightly before him he peered at it questioningly, one thin hand in his gray hair.

Of a sudden there came to him now for the first time in many years the full charm of her girlish figure as he had known it in boyhood, the pleasing, sympathetic smile, the brown hair, the blue sash she had once worn about her waist at a picnic, her gay, graceful movements. He walked around the base of the tree, straining with his eyes, forgetting for once his cane and utensils, and following eagerly after. On she moved before him, a will-o'-the-wisp of the spring, a little flame above her head, and it seemed as though among the small saplings of ash and beech and the thick trunks of hickory and elm that she signaled with a young, a lightsome hand.

"O Phoebe! Phoebe!" he called. "Have yuh really come? Have yuh really answered me?" And hurrying faster, he fell once, scrambling lamely to his feet, only to see the light in the distance dancing illusively on. On and on he hurried until he was fairly running, brushing his ragged arms against the trees, striking his hands and face against impeding twigs. His hat was gone, his lungs were breathless, his reason quite astray, when coming to the edge of

the cliff he saw her below among a silvery bed of apple-trees now blooming in the spring.

"O Phoebe!" he called. "O Phoebe! Oh, no, don't leave me!" And feeling the lure of a world where love was young and Phoebe as this vision presented her, a delightful epitome of their quondam youth, he gave a gay cry of "Oh, wait, Phoebe!" and leaped.

Some farmer-boys, reconnoitering this region of bounty and prospect some few days afterward, found first the tin utensils tied together under the tree where he had left them, and then later at the foot of the cliff, pale, broken, but elate, a molded smile of peace and delight upon his lips, his body. His old hat was discovered lying under some low-growing saplings the twigs of which had held it back. No one of all the simple population knew how eagerly and joyously he had found his lost mate.

THE MACHINE STOPS[1]

by E. M. Forster

Part I

THE AIR-SHIP

Edward Morgan Forster (1879-), British writer, was educated at King's College, Cambridge. He has a gift for keen analysis of social character and relationships, a subject-matter which he has handled skilfully in the story included here. In 1924 he published *A Passage to India,* which was a fruit of first-hand observation of modern Indian life; with it Forster entered into a fuller public recognition of his powers as a writer. He numbers among his books *A Room with a View, Howard's End, Pharos and Pharillon,* and *The Eternal Moment.*

IMAGINE, if you can, a small room, hexagonal in shape, like the cell of a bee. It is lighted neither by window nor by lamp, yet it is filled with a soft radiance. There are no apertures for ventilation, yet the air is fresh. There are no musical instruments, and yet, at the moment that my meditation opens, this room is throbbing with melodious sounds. An arm-chair is in the center, by its side a reading-desk—that is all the furniture. And in the arm-chair there sits a swaddled lump of flesh—a woman, about five feet high, with a face as white as a fungus. It is to her that the little room belongs.

An electric bell rang.

The woman touched a switch and the music was silent.

"I suppose I must see who it is," she thought, and set her chair in motion. The chair, like the music, was worked

[1] From *The Eternal Moment* by E. M. Forster. Copyright, 1928, by Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc.

by machinery, and it rolled her to the other side of the room, where the bell still rang importunately.

"Who is it?" she called. Her voice was irritable, for she had been interrupted often since the music began. She knew several thousand people; in certain directions human intercourse had advanced enormously.

But when she listened into the receiver, her white face wrinkled into smiles, and she said:

"Very well. Let us talk, I will isolate myself. I do not expect anything important will happen for the next five minutes—for I can give you fully five minutes, Kuno. Then I must deliver my lecture on 'Music during the Australian Period.' "

She touched the isolation knob, so that no one else could speak to her. Then she touched the lighting apparatus, and the little room was plunged into darkness.

"Be quick!" she called, her irritation returning. "Be quick, Kuno; here I am in the dark wasting my time."

But it was fully fifteen seconds before the round plate that she held in her hands began to glow. A faint blue light shot across it, darkening to purple, and presently she could see the image of her son, who lived on the other side of the earth, and he could see her.

"Kuno, how slow you are."

He smiled gravely.

"I really believe you enjoy dawdling."

"I have called you before, mother, but you were always busy or isolated. I have something particular to say."

"What is it, dearest boy? Be quick. Why could you not send it by pneumatic post?"

"Because I prefer saying such a thing. I want—"

"Well?"

"I want you to come and see me."

Vashti watched his face in the blue plate.

"But I can see you!" she exclaimed. "What more do you want?"

"I want to see you not through the Machine," said Kuno. "I want to speak to you not through the wearisome Machine."

"Oh, hush!" said his mother, vaguely shocked. "You mustn't say anything against the Machine."

"Why not?"

"One mustn't."

"You talk as if a god had made the Machine," cried the other. "I believe that you pray to it when you are unhappy. Men made it, do not forget that. Great men, but men. The Machine is much, but it is not everything. I see something like you in this plate, but I do not see you. I hear something like you through this telephone, but I do not hear you. That is why I want you to come. Come and stop with me. Pay me a visit, so that we can meet face to face, and talk about the hopes that are in my mind."

She replied that she could scarcely spare the time for a visit.

"The air-ship barely takes two days to fly between me and you."

"I dislike air-ships."

"Why?"

"I dislike seeing the horrible brown earth, and the sea, and the stars when it is dark. I get no ideas in an air-ship."

"I do not get them anywhere else."

"What kind of ideas can the air give you?"

He paused for an instant.

"Do you not know four big stars that form an oblong, and three stars close together in the middle of the oblong, and hanging from these stars, three other stars?"

"No, I do not. I dislike the stars. But did they give you an idea? How interesting; tell me."

"I had an idea that they were like a man."

"I do not understand."

"The four big stars are the man's shoulders and his knees. The three stars in the middle are like the belts that men wore once, and the three stars hanging are like a sword."

"A sword?"

"Men carried swords about with them, to kill animals and other men."

"It does not strike me as a very good idea, but it is certainly original. When did it come to you first?"

"In the air-ship—" He broke off, and she fancied that he looked sad. She could not be sure, for the Machine did not transmit *nuances* of expression. It only gave a general idea of people—an idea that was good enough for all practical purposes, Vashti thought. The imponderable bloom, declared by a discredited philosophy to be the actual essence of intercourse, was rightly ignored by the Machine, just as the imponderable bloom of the grape was ignored by the manufacturers of artificial fruit. Something "good enough" had long since been accepted by our race.

"The truth is," he continued, "that I want to see these stars again. They are curious stars. I want to see them not from the air-ship, but from the surface of the earth, as our ancestors did, thousands of years ago. I want to visit the surface of the earth."

She was shocked again.

"Mother, you must come, if only to explain to me what is the harm of visiting the surface of the earth."

"No harm," she replied, controlling herself. "But no advantage. The surface of the earth is only dust and mud, no life remains on it, and you would need a respirator, or

the cold of the outer air would kill you. One dies immediately in the outer air."

"I know; of course I shall take all precautions."

"And besides—"

"Well?"

She considered, and chose her words with care. Her son had a queer temper, and she wished to dissuade him from the expedition.

"It is contrary to the spirit of the age," she asserted.

"Do you mean by that, contrary to the Machine?"

"In a sense, but—"

His image in the blue plate faded.

"Kuno!"

He had isolated himself.

For a moment Vashti felt lonely.

Then she generated the light, and the sight of her room, flooded with radiance and studded with electric buttons, revived her. There were buttons and switches everywhere—buttons to call for food, for music, for clothing. There was the hot-bath button, by pressure of which a basin of (imitation) marble rose out of the floor, filled to the brim with a warm deodorized liquid. There was the cold-bath button. There was the button that produced literature. And there were of course the buttons by which she communicated with her friends. The room, though it contained nothing, was in touch with all that she cared for in the world.

Vashti's next move was to turn off the isolation-switch, and all the accumulations of the last three minutes burst upon her. The room was filled with the noise of bells, and speaking-tubes. What was the new food like? Could she recommend it? Had she had any ideas lately? Might one tell her one's own ideas? Would she make an engagement

to visit the public nurseries at an early date?—say this day month.

To most of these questions she replied with irritation—a growing quality in that accelerated age. She said that the new food was horrible. That she could not visit the public nurseries through press of engagements. That she had no ideas of her own but had just been told one—that four stars and three in the middle were like a man: she doubted there was much in it. Then she switched off her correspondents, for it was time to deliver her lecture on Australian music.

The clumsy system of public gatherings had been long since abandoned; neither Vashti nor her audience stirred from their rooms. Seated in her arm-chair she spoke, while they in their arm-chairs heard her, fairly well, and saw her, fairly well. She opened with a humorous account of music in the pre-Mongolian epoch, and went on to describe the great outburst of song that followed the Chinese conquest. Remote and primeval as were the methods of I-San-So and the Brisbane school, she yet felt (she said) that study of them might repay the musician of today: they had freshness; they had, above all, ideas.

Her lecture, which lasted ten minutes, was well received, and at its conclusion she and many of her audience listened to a lecture on the sea; there were ideas to be got from the sea; the speaker had donned a respirator and visited it lately. Then she fed, talked to many friends, had a bath, talked again, and summoned her bed.

The bed was not to her liking. It was too large, and she had a feeling for a small bed. Complaint was useless, for beds were of the same dimension all over the world, and to have had an alternative size would have involved vast alterations in the Machine. Vashti isolated herself—it was necessary, for neither day nor night existed under the

ground—and reviewed all that had happened since she had summoned the bed last. Ideas? Scarcely any. Events —was Kuno's invitation an event?

By her side, on the little reading-desk, was a survival from the ages of litter—one book. This was the Book of the Machine. In it were instructions against every possible contingency. If she was hot or cold or dyspeptic or at loss for a word, she went to the book, and it told her which button to press. The Central Committee published it. In accordance with a growing habit, it was richly bound.

Sitting up in the bed, she took it reverently in her hands. She glanced round the glowing room as if some one might be watching her. Then, half ashamed, half joyful, she murmured "O Machine! O Machine!" and raised the volume to her lips. Thrice she kissed it, thrice inclined her head, thrice she felt the delirium of acquiescence. Her ritual performed, she turned to page 1367, which gave the times of the departure of the air-ships from the island in the southern hemisphere, under whose soil she lived, to the island in the northern hemisphere, whereunder lived her son.

She thought, "I have not the time."

She made the room dark and slept; she awoke and made the room light; she ate and exchanged ideas with her friends, and listened to music and attended lectures; she made the room dark and slept. Above her, beneath her, and around her, the Machine hummed eternally; she did not notice the noise, for she had been born with it in her ears. The earth, carrying her, hummed as it sped through silence, turning her now to the invisible sun, now to the invisible stars. She awoke and made the room light.

"Kuno!"

"I will not talk to you," he answered, "until you come."

"Have you been on the surface of the earth since we spoke last?"

His image faded.

Again she consulted the book. She became very nervous and lay back in her chair palpitating. Think of her as without teeth or hair. Presently she directed the chair to the wall, and pressed an unfamiliar button. The wall swung apart slowly. Through the opening she saw a tunnel that curved slightly, so that its goal was not visible. Should she go to see her son, here was the beginning of the journey.

Of course she knew all about the communication-system. There was nothing mysterious in it. She would summon a car and it would fly with her down the tunnel until it reached the lift that communicated with the air-ship station: the system had been in use for many, many years, long before the universal establishment of the Machine. And of course she had studied the civilization that had immediately preceded her own—the civilization that had mistaken the functions of the system, and had used it for bringing people to things, instead of for bringing things to people. Those funny old days, when men went for change of air instead of changing the air in their rooms! And yet—she was frightened of the tunnel: she had not seen it since her last child was born. It curved—but not quite as she remembered; it was brilliant—but not quite as brilliant as a lecturer had suggested. Vashti was seized with the terrors of direct experience. She shrank back into the room, and the wall closed up again.

"Kuno," she said, "I cannot come to see you. I am not well."

Immediately an enormous apparatus fell on to her out of the ceiling, a thermometer was automatically inserted between her lips, a stethoscope was automatically laid

upon her heart. She lay powerless. Cool pads soothed her forehead. Kuno had telegraphed to her doctor.

So the human passions still blundered up and down in the Machine. Vashti drank the medicine that the doctor projected into her mouth, and the machinery retired into the ceiling. The voice of Kuno was heard asking how she felt.

"Better." Then with irritation: "But why do you not come to me instead?"

"Because I cannot leave this place."

"Why?"

"Because, any moment, something tremendous may happen."

"Have you been on the surface of the earth yet?"

"Not yet."

"Then what is it?"

"I will not tell you through the Machine."

She resumed her life.

But she thought of Kuno as a baby, his birth, his removal to the public nurseries, her one visit to him there, his visits to her—visits which stopped when the Machine had assigned him a room on the other side of the earth. "Parents, duties of," said the book of the Machine, "cease at the moment of birth. P. 422327483." True, but there was something special about Kuno—indeed there had been something special about all her children—and, after all, she must brave the journey if he desired it. And "something tremendous might happen." What did that mean? The nonsense of a youthful man, no doubt, but she must go. Again she pressed the unfamiliar button, again the wall swung back, and she saw the tunnel that curved out of sight. Clasping the Book, she rose, tottered on to the platform, and summoned the car. Her room closed behind her: the journey to the northern hemisphere had begun.

Of course it was perfectly easy. The car approached and in it she found arm-chairs exactly like her own. When she signaled, it stopped, and she tottered into the lift. One other passenger was in the lift, the first fellow creature she had seen face to face for months. Few traveled in these days, for, thanks to the advance of science, the earth was exactly alike all over. Rapid intercourse, from which the previous civilization had hoped so much, had ended by defeating itself. What was the good of going to Pekin when it was just like Shrewsbury? Why return to Shrewsbury when it would be just like Pekin? Men seldom moved their bodies; all unrest was concentrated in the soul.

The air-ship service was a relic from the former age. It was kept up, because it was easier to keep it up than to stop it or to diminish it, but it now far exceeded the wants of the population. Vessel after vessel would rise from the vomitories of Rye or of Christchurch (I use the antique names), would sail into the crowded sky, and would draw up at the wharves of the south—empty. So nicely adjusted was the system, so independent of meteorology, that the sky, whether calm or cloudy, resembled a vast kaleidoscope whereon the same patterns periodically recurred. The ship on which Vashti sailed started now at sunset, now at dawn. But always, as it passed above Rheims, it would neighbor the ship that served between Helsingfors and the Brazils, and, every third time it surmounted the Alps, the fleet of Palermo would cross its track behind. Night and day, wind and storm, tide and earthquake, impeded man no longer. He had harnessed Leviathan. All the old literature, with its praise of Nature, and its fear of Nature, rang false as the prattle of a child.

Yet as Vashti saw the vast flank of the ship, stained with exposure to the outer air, her horror of direct experi-

ence returned. It was not quite like the air-ship in the cinematophote. For one thing it smelt—not strongly or unpleasantly, but it did smell, and with her eyes shut she should have known that a new thing was close to her. Then she had to walk to it from the lift, had to submit to glances from the other passengers. The man in front dropped his Book—no great matter, but it disquieted them all. In the rooms, if the Book was dropped, the floor raised it mechanically, but the gangway to the air-ship was not so prepared, and the sacred volume lay motionless. They stopped—the thing was unforeseen—and the man, instead of picking up his property, felt the muscles of his arm to see how they had failed him. Then some one actually said with direct utterance: "We shall be late"—and they trooped on board, Vashti treading on the pages as she did so.

Inside, her anxiety increased. The arrangements were old-fashioned and rough. There was even a female attendant, to whom she would have to announce her wants during the voyage. Of course a revolving platform ran the length of the boat, but she was expected to walk from it to her cabin. Some cabins were better than others, and she did not get the best. She thought the attendant had been unfair, and spasms of rage shook her. The glass valves had closed, she could not go back. She saw, at the end of the vestibule, the lift in which she had ascended going quietly up and down, empty. Beneath those corridors of shining tiles were rooms, tier below tier, reaching far into the earth, and in each room there sat a human being, eating, or sleeping, or producing ideas. And buried deep in the hive was her own room. Vashti was afraid.

"O Machine! O Machine!" she murmured, and caressed her Book, and was comforted.

Then the sides of the vestibule seemed to melt together,

as do the passages that we see in dreams, the lift vanished, the Book that had been dropped slid to the left and vanished, polished tiles rushed by like a stream of water, there was a slight jar, and the air-ship, issuing from its tunnel, soared above the waters of a tropical ocean.

It was night. For a moment she saw the coast of Sumatra edged by the phosphorescence of waves, and crowned by lighthouses, still sending forth their disregarded beams. They also vanished, and only the stars distracted her. They were not motionless, but swayed to and fro above her head, thronging out of one skylight into another, as if the universe and not the air-ship was careening. And, as often happens on clear nights, they seemed now to be in perspective, now on a plane; now piled tier beyond tier into the infinite heavens, now concealing infinity, a roof limiting for ever the visions of men. In either case they seemed intolerable. "Are we to travel in the dark?" called the passengers angrily, and the attendant, who had been careless, generated the light, and pulled down the blinds of pliable metal. When the air-ships had been built, the desire to look direct at things still lingered in the world. Hence the extraordinary number of skylights and windows, and the proportionate discomfort to those who were civilized and refined. Even in Vashti's cabin one star peeped through a flaw in the blind, and after a few hours' uneasy slumber, she was disturbed by an unfamiliar glow, which was the dawn.

Quick as the ship had sped westwards, the earth had rolled eastwards quicker still, and had dragged back Vashti and her companions towards the sun. Science could prolong the night, but only for a little, and those high hopes of neutralizing the earth's diurnal revolution had passed, together with hopes that were possibly higher. To

"keep pace with the sun," or even to outstrip it, had been the aim of the civilization preceding this. Racing aeroplanes had been built for the purpose, capable of enormous speed, and steered by the greatest intellects of the epoch. Round the globe they went, round and round, westward, westward, round and round, amidst humanity's applause. In vain. The globe went eastward quicker still, horrible accidents occurred, and the Committee of the Machine, at the time rising into prominence, declared the pursuit illegal, unmechanical, and punishable by Homelessness.

Of Homelessness more will be said later.

Doubtless the Committee was right. Yet the attempt to "defeat the sun" aroused the last common interest that our race experienced about the heavenly bodies, or indeed about anything. It was the last time that men were compacted by thinking of a power outside the world. The sun had conquered, yet it was the end of his spiritual dominion. Dawn, midday, twilight, the zodiacal path, touched neither men's lives nor their hearts, and science retreated into the ground, to concentrate herself upon problems that she was certain of solving.

So when Vashti found her cabin invaded by a rosy finger of light, she was annoyed, and tried to adjust the blind. But the blind flew up altogether, and she saw through the skylight small pink clouds, swaying against a background of blue, and as the sun crept higher, its radiance entered direct, brimming down the wall, like a golden sea. It rose and fell with the air-ship's motion, just as waves rise and fall, but it advanced steadily, as a tide advances. Unless she was careful, it would strike her face. A spasm of horror shook her and she rang for the attendant. The attendant too was horrified, but she could

do nothing; it was not her place to mend the blind. She could only suggest that the lady should change her cabin, which she accordingly prepared to do.

People were almost exactly alike all over the world, but the attendant of the air-ship, perhaps owing to her exceptional duties, had grown a little out of the common. She had often to address passengers with direct speech, and this had given her a certain roughness and originality of manner. When Vashti swerved away from the sunbeams with a cry, she behaved barbarically—she put out her hand to steady her.

"How dare you!" exclaimed the passenger. "You forget yourself!"

The woman was confused, and apologized for not having let her fall. People never touched one another. The custom had become obsolete, owing to the Machine.

"Where are we now?" asked Vashti haughtily.

"We are over Asia," said the attendant, anxious to be polite.

"Asia?"

"You must excuse my common way of speaking. I have got into the habit of calling places over which I pass by their unmechanical names."

"Oh, I remember Asia. The Mongols came from it."

"Beneath us, in the open air, stood a city that was once called Simla."

"Have you ever heard of the Mongols and of the Brisbane school?"

"No."

"Brisbane also stood in the open air."

"Those mountains to the right—let me show you them." She pushed back a metal blind. The main chain of the Himalayas was revealed. "They were once called the Roof of the World, those mountains."

"What a foolish name!"

"You must remember that, before the dawn of civilization, they seemed to be an impenetrable wall that touched the stars. It was supposed that no one but the gods could exist above their summits. How we have advanced, thanks to the Machine!"

"How we have advanced, thanks to the Machine!" said Vashti.

"How we have advanced, thanks to the Machine!" echoed the passenger who had dropped his Book the night before, and who was standing in the passage.

"And that white stuff in the cracks?—what is it?"

"I have forgotten its name."

"Cover the window, please. These mountains give me no ideas."

The northern aspect of the Himalayas was in deep shadow: on the Indian slope the sun had just prevailed. The forests had been destroyed during the literature epoch for the purpose of making newspaper-pulp, but the snows were awakening to their morning glory, and clouds still hung on the breasts of Kinchinjunga. In the plain were seen the ruins of cities, with diminished rivers creeping by their walls, and by the sides of these were sometimes the signs of vomitories, marking the cities of today. Over the whole prospect air-ships rushed, crossing and intercrossing with incredible aplomb, and rising nonchalantly when they desired to escape the perturbations of the lower atmosphere and to traverse the Roof of the World.

"We have indeed advanced, thanks to the Machine," repeated the attendant, and hid the Himalayas behind a metal blind.

The day dragged wearily forward. The passengers sat each in his cabin, avoiding one another with an almost physical repulsion and longing to be once more under the

surface of the earth. There were eight or ten of them, mostly young males, sent out from the public nurseries to inhabit the rooms of those who had died in various parts of the earth. The man who had dropped his Book was on the homeward journey. He had been sent to Sumatra for the purpose of propagating the race. Vashti alone was traveling by her private will.

At midday she took a second glance at the earth. The air-ship was crossing another range of mountains, but she could see little, owing to clouds. Masses of black rock hovered below her, and merged indistinctly into gray. Their shapes were fantastic; one of them resembled a prostrate man.

"No ideas here," murmured Vashti, and hid the Caucasus behind a metal blind.

In the evening she looked again. They were crossing a golden sea, in which lay many small islands and one peninsula.

She repeated, "No ideas here," and hid Greece behind a metal blind.

Part II

THE MENDING APPARATUS

By a vestibule, by a lift, by a tubular railway, by a platform, by a sliding door—by reversing all the steps of her departure did Vashti arrive at her son's room, which exactly resembled her own. She might well declare that the visit was superfluous. The buttons, the knobs, the reading-desk with the Book, the temperature, the atmosphere, the illumination—all were exactly the same. And if Kuno himself, flesh of her flesh, stood close beside her at last, what profit was there in that? She was too well-bred to shake him by the hand.

Averting her eyes, she spoke as follows:

"Here I am. I have had the most terrible journey and greatly retarded the development of my soul. It is not worth it, Kuno, it is not worth it. My time is too precious. The sunlight almost touched me, and I have met with the rudest people. I can only stop a few minutes. Say what you want to say, and then I must return."

"I have been threatened with Homelessness," said Kuno.

She looked at him now.

"I have been threatened with Homelessness, and I could not tell you such a thing through the Machine."

Homelessness means death. The victim is exposed to the air, which kills him.

"I have been outside since I spoke to you last. The tremendous thing has happened, and they have discovered me."

"But why shouldn't you go outside!" she exclaimed. "It is perfectly legal, perfectly mechanical, to visit the surface of the earth. I have lately been to a lecture on the sea; there is no objection to that; one simply summons a respirator and gets an Egression-permit. It is not the kind of thing that spiritually-minded people do, and I begged you not to do it, but there is no legal objection to it."

"I did not get an Egression-permit."

"Then how did you get out?"

"I found out a way of my own."

The phrase conveyed no meaning to her, and he had to repeat it.

"A way of your own?" she whispered. "But that would be wrong."

"Why?"

The question shocked her beyond measure.

"You are beginning to worship the Machine," he said

coldly. "You think it irreligious of me to have found out a way of my own. It was just what the Committee thought, when they threatened me with Homelessness."

At this she grew angry. "I worship nothing!" she cried. "I am most advanced. I don't think you irreligious, for there is no such thing as religion left. All the fear and the superstition that existed once have been destroyed by the Machine. I only meant that to find out a way of your own was— Besides, there is no new way out."

"So it is always supposed."

"Except through the vomitories, for which one must have an Egression-permit, it is impossible to get out. The Book says so."

"Well, the Book's wrong, for I have been out on my feet."

For Kuno was possessed of a certain physical strength.

By these days it was a demerit to be muscular. Each infant was examined at birth, and all who promised undue strength were destroyed. Humanitarians may protest, but it would have been no true kindness to let an athlete live; he would never have been happy in that state of life to which the Machine had called him; he would have yearned for trees to climb, rivers to bathe in, meadows and hills against which he might measure his body. Man must be adapted to his surroundings, must he not? In the dawn of the world our weakly must be exposed on Mount Taygetus, in its twilight our strong will suffer euthanasia, that the Machine may progress, that the Machine may progress, that the Machine may progress eternally.

"You know that we have lost the sense of space. We say 'space is annihilated,' but we have annihilated not space, but the sense thereof. We have lost a part of ourselves. I determined to recover it, and I began by walking up and down the platform of the railway outside my room. Up

and down, until I was tired, and so did recapture the meaning of 'Near' and 'Far.' 'Near' is a place to which I can get quickly *on my feet*, not a place to which the train or the air-ship will take me quickly. 'Far' is a place to which I cannot get quickly on my feet; the vomitory is 'far,' though I could be there in thirty-eight seconds by summoning the train. Man is the measure. That was my first lesson. Man's feet are the measure for distance, his hands are the measure for ownership, his body is the measure for all that is lovable and desirable and strong. Then I went further: it was then that I called to you for the first time, and you would not come.

"This city, as you know, is built deep beneath the surface of the earth, with only the vomitories protruding. Having paced the platform outside my own room, I took the lift to the next platform and paced that also, and so with each in turn, until I came to the topmost, above which begins the earth. All the platforms were exactly alike, and all that I gained by visiting them was to develop my sense of space and my muscles. I think I should have been content with this—it is not a little thing—but as I walked and brooded, it occurred to me that our cities had been built in the days when men still breathed the outer air, and that there had been ventilation shafts for the workmen. I could think of nothing but these ventilation shafts. Had they been destroyed by all the food-tubes and medicine-tubes and music-tubes that the Machine has evolved lately? Or did traces of them remain? One thing was certain. If I came upon them anywhere, it would be in the railway-tunnels of the topmost story. Everywhere else, all space was accounted for.

"I am telling my story quickly, but don't think that I was not a coward or that your answers never depressed me. It is not the proper thing, it is not mechanical, it is not

decent to walk along a railway-tunnel. I did not fear that I might tread upon a live rail and be killed. I feared something far more intangible—doing what was not contemplated by the Machine. Then I said to myself, 'Man is the measure,' and I went, and after many visits I found an opening.

"The tunnels, of course, were lighted. Everything is light, artificial light; darkness is the exception. So when I saw a black gap in the tiles, I knew that it was an exception, and rejoiced. I put in my arm—I could put in no more at first—and waved it round and round in ecstasy. I loosened another tile, and put in my head, and shouted into the darkness: 'I am coming, I shall do it yet,' and my voice reverberated down endless passages. I seemed to hear the spirits of those dead workmen who had returned each evening to the starlight and to their wives, and all the generations who had lived in the open air called back to me, 'You will do it yet, you are coming.' "

He paused, and, absurd as he was, his last words moved her. For Kuno had lately asked to be a father, and his request had been refused by the Committee. His was not a type that the Machine desired to hand on.

"Then a train passed. It brushed by me, but I thrust my head and arms into the hole. I had done enough for one day, so I crawled back to the platform, went down in the lift, and summoned my bed. Ah, what dreams! And again I called you, and again you refused."

She shook her head and said:

"Don't. Don't talk of these terrible things. You make me miserable. You are throwing civilization away."

"But I had got back the sense of space and a man cannot rest then. I determined to get in at the hole and climb the shaft. And so I exercised my arms. Day after day I went through ridiculous movements, until my flesh ached,

and I could hang by my hands and hold the pillow of my bed outstretched for many minutes. Then I summoned a respirator, and started.

"It was easy at first. The mortar had somehow rotted, and I soon pushed some more tiles in, and clambered after them into the darkness, and the spirits of the dead comforted me. I don't know what I mean by that. I just say what I felt. I felt, for the first time, that a protest had been lodged against corruption, and that even as the dead were comforting me, so I was comforting the unborn. I felt that humanity existed, and that it existed without clothes. How can I possibly explain this? It was naked, humanity seemed naked, and all these tubes and buttons and machineries neither came into the world with us, nor will they follow us out, nor do they matter supremely while we are here. Had I been strong, I would have torn off every garment I had, and gone out into the outer air unswaddled. But this is not for me, nor perhaps for my generation. I climbed with my respirator and my hygienic clothes and my dietetic tabloids! Better thus than not at all.

"There was a ladder, made of some primeval metal. The light from the railway fell upon its lowest rungs, and I saw that it led straight upwards out of the rubble at the bottom of the shaft. Perhaps our ancestors ran up and down it a dozen times daily, in their building. As I climbed, the rough edges cut through my gloves so that my hands bled. The light helped me for a little, and then came darkness and, worse still, silence which pierced my ears like a sword. The Machine hums! Did you know that? Its hum penetrates our blood, and may even guide our thoughts. Who knows! I was getting beyond its power. Then I thought: 'This silence means that I am doing wrong.' But I heard voices in the silence, and again they

strengthened me." He laughed. "I had need of them. The next moment I cracked my head against something."

She sighed.

"I had reached one of those pneumatic stoppers that defend us from the outer air. You may have noticed them on the air-ship. Pitch dark, my feet on the rungs of an invisible ladder, my hands cut; I cannot explain how I lived through this part, but the voices still comforted me, and I felt for fastenings. The stopper, I suppose, was about eight feet across. I passed my hand over it as far as I could reach. It was perfectly smooth. I felt it almost to the center. Not quite to the center, for my arm was too short. Then the voice said: 'Jump. It is worth it. There may be a handle in the center, and you may catch hold of it and so come to us your own way. And if there is no handle, so that you may fall and are dashed to pieces—it is still worth it: you will still come to us your own way.' So I jumped. There was a handle, and—"

He paused. Tears gathered in his mother's eyes. She knew that he was fated. If he did not die today he would die tomorrow. There was not room for such a person in the world. And with her pity disgust mingled. She was ashamed at having borne such a son, she who had always been so respectable and so full of ideas. Was he really the little boy to whom she had taught the use of his stops and buttons, and to whom she had given his first lessons in the Book? The very hair that disfigured his lip showed that he was reverting to some savage type. On atavism the Machine can have no mercy.

"There was a handle, and I did catch it. I hung tranced over the darkness and heard the hum of these workings as the last whisper in a dying dream. All the things I had cared about and all the people I had spoken to through tubes appeared infinitely little. Meanwhile the handle

revolved. My weight had set something in motion and I span slowly, and then—

"I cannot describe it. I was lying with my face to the sunshine. Blood poured from my nose and ears and I heard a tremendous roaring. The stopper, with me clinging to it, had simply been blown out of the earth, and the air that we make down here was escaping through the vent into the air above. It burst up like a fountain. I crawled back to it—for the upper air hurts—and, as it were, I took great sips from the edge. My respirator had flown goodness knows where, my clothes were torn. I just lay with my lips close to the hole, and I sipped until the bleeding stopped. You can imagine nothing so curious. This hollow in the grass—I will speak of it in a minute,—the sun shining into it, not brilliantly but through marbled clouds,—the peace, the nonchalance, the sense of space, and, brushing my cheek, the roaring fountain of our artificial air! Soon I spied my respirator, bobbing up and down in the current high above my head, and higher still were many air-ships. But no one ever looks out of air-ships, and in my case they could not have picked me up. There I was, stranded. The sun shone a little way down the shaft, and revealed the topmost rung of the ladder, but it was hopeless trying to reach it. I should either have been tossed up again by the escape, or else have fallen in, and died. I could only lie on the grass, sipping and sipping, and from time to time glancing around me.

"I knew that I was in Wessex, for I had taken care to go to a lecture on the subject before starting. Wessex lies above the room in which we are talking now. It was once an important state. Its kings held all the southern coast from the Andredswald to Cornwall, while the Wansdyke protected them on the north, running over the high ground. The lecturer was only concerned with the rise of

Wessex, so I do not know how long it remained an international power, nor would the knowledge have assisted me. To tell the truth I could do nothing but laugh, during this part. There was I, with a pneumatic stopper by my side and a respirator bobbing over my head, imprisoned, all three of us, in a grass-grown hollow that was edged with fern."

Then he grew grave again.

"Lucky for me that it was a hollow. For the air began to fall back into it and to fill it as water fills a bowl. I could crawl about. Presently I stood. I breathed a mixture, in which the air that hurts predominated whenever I tried to climb the sides. This was not so bad. I had not lost my tabloids and remained ridiculously cheerful, and as for the Machine, I forgot about it altogether. My one aim now was to get to the top, where the ferns were, and to view whatever objects lay beyond.

"I rushed the slope. The new air was still too bitter for me and I came rolling back, after a momentary vision of something gray. The sun grew very feeble, and I remembered that he was in Scorpio—I had been to a lecture on that too. If the sun is in Scorpio and you are in Wessex, it means that you must be as quick as you can, or it will get too dark. (This is the first bit of useful information I have ever got from a lecture, and I expect it will be the last.) It made me try frantically to breathe the new air, and to advance as far as I dared out of my pond. The hollow filled so slowly. At times I thought that the fountain played with less vigor. My respirator seemed to dance nearer the earth; the roar was decreasing."

He broke off.

"I don't think this is interesting you. The rest will interest you even less. There are no ideas in it, and I wish

that I had not troubled you to come. We are too different, mother."

She told him to continue.

"It was evening before I climbed the bank. The sun had very nearly slipped out of the sky by this time, and I could not get a good view. You, who have just crossed the Roof of the World, will not want to hear an account of the little hills that I saw—low colorless hills. But to me they were living and the turf that covered them was a skin, under which their muscles rippled, and I felt that those hills had called with incalculable force to men in the past, and that men had loved them. Now they sleep—perhaps for ever. They commune with humanity in dreams. Happy the man, happy the woman, who awakes the hills of Wessex. For though they sleep, they will never die."

His voice rose passionately.

"Cannot you see, cannot all your lecturers see, that it is we who are dying, and that down here the only thing that really lives is the Machine? We created the Machine, to do our will, but we cannot make it do our will now. It has robbed us of the sense of space and of the sense of touch, it has blurred every human relation and narrowed down love to a carnal act, it has paralyzed our bodies and our wills, and now it compels us to worship it. The Machine develops—but not on our lines. The Machine proceeds—but not to our goal. We only exist as the blood corpuscles that course through its arteries, and if it could work without us, it would let us die. Oh, I have no remedy—or, at least, only one—to tell men again and again that I have seen the hills of Wessex as Aelfrid saw them when he overthrew the Danes.

"So the sun set. I forgot to mention that a belt of mist lay between my hill and other hills, and that it was the color of pearl."

He broke off for the second time.

"Go on," said his mother wearily.

He shook his head.

"Go on. Nothing that you say can distress me now. I am hardened."

"I had meant to tell you the rest, but I cannot: I know that I cannot: good-bye."

Vashti stood irresolute. All her nerves were tingling with his blasphemies. But she was also inquisitive.

"This is unfair," she complained. "You have called me across the world to hear your story, and hear it I will. Tell me—as briefly as possible, for this is a disastrous waste of time—tell me how you returned to civilization."

"Oh,—that!" he said, starting. "You would like to hear about civilization. Certainly. Had I got to where my respirator fell down?"

"No—but I understand everything now. You put on your respirator, and managed to walk along the surface of the earth to a vomitory, and there your conduct was reported to the Central Committee."

"By no means."

He passed his hand over his forehead, as if dispelling some strong impression. Then, resuming his narrative, he warmed to it again.

"My respirator fell about sunset. I had mentioned that the fountain seemed feebler, had I not?"

"Yes."

"About sunset, it let the respirator fall. As I said, I had entirely forgotten about the Machine, and I paid no great attention at the time, being occupied with other things. I had my pool of air, into which I could dip when the outer keenness became intolerable, and which would possibly remain for days, provided that no wind sprang up to disperse it. Not until it was too late, did I realize

what the stoppage of the escape implied. You see—the gap in the tunnel had been mended; the Mending Apparatus, the Mending Apparatus, was after me.

"One other warning I had, but I neglected it. The sky at night was clearer than it had been in the day, and the moon, which was about half the sky behind the sun, shone into the dell at moments quite brightly. I was in my usual place—on the boundary between the two atmospheres—when I thought I saw something dark move across the bottom of the dell, and vanish into the shaft. In my folly, I ran down. I bent over and listened, and I thought I heard a faint scraping noise in the depths.

"At this—but it was too late—I took alarm. I determined to put on my respirator and to walk right out of the dell. But my respirator had gone. I knew exactly where it had fallen—between the stopper and the aperture—and I could even feel the mark that it had made in the turf. It had gone, and I realized that something evil was at work, and I had better escape to the other air, and, if I must die, die running towards the cloud that had been the color of a pearl. I never started. Out of the shaft—it is too horrible. A worm, a long white worm, had crawled out of the shaft and was gliding over the moonlit grass.

"I screamed. I did everything that I should not have done, I stamped upon the creature instead of flying from it, and it at once curled round the ankle. Then we fought. The worm let me run all over the dell, but edged up my leg as I ran. 'Help!' I cried. (That part is too awful. It belongs to the part that you will never know.) 'Help!' I cried. (Why cannot we suffer in silence?) 'Help!' I cried. Then my feet were wound together, I fell, I was dragged away from the dear ferns and the living hills, and past the great metal stopper (I can tell you this part), and I thought it might save me again if I caught hold of the

handle. It also was enwrapped, it also. Oh, the whole dell was full of the things. They were searching it in all directions, they were denuding it, and the white snouts of others peeped out of the hole, ready if needed. Everything that could be moved they brought—brushwood, bundles of fern, everything, and down we all went intertwined into hell. The last things that I saw, ere the stopper closed after us, were certain stars, and I felt that a man of my sort lived in the sky. For I did fight, I fought till the very end, and it was only my head hitting against the ladder that quieted me. I woke up in this room. The worms had vanished. I was surrounded by artificial air, artificial light, artificial peace, and my friends were calling to me down speaking-tubes to know whether I had come across any new ideas lately."

Here his story ended. Discussion of it was impossible, and Vashti turned to go.

"It will end in Homelessness," she said quietly.

"I wish it would," retorted Kuno.

"The Machine has been most merciful."

"I prefer the mercy of God."

"By that superstitious phrase, do you mean that you could live in the outer air?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever seen, round the vomitories, the bones of those who were extruded after the Great Rebellion?"

"Yes."

"They were left where they perished for our edification. A few crawled away, but they perished, too—who can doubt it? And so with the Homeless of our own day. The surface of the earth supports life no longer."

"Indeed."

"Ferns and a little grass may survive, but all higher forms have perished. Has any air-ship detected them?"

"No."

"Has any lecturer dealt with them?"

"No."

"Then why this obstinacy?"

"Because I have seen them," he exploded.

"Seen *what?*"

"Because I have seen her in the twilight—because she came to my help when I called—because she, too, was entangled by the worms, and, luckier than I, was killed by one of them piercing her throat."

He was mad. Vashti departed, nor, in the troubles that followed, did she ever see his face again.

Part III

THE HOMELESS

During the years that followed Kuno's escapade, two important developments took place in the Machine. On the surface they were revolutionary, but in either case men's minds had been prepared beforehand, and they did but express tendencies that were latent already.

The first of these was the abolition of respirators.

Advanced thinkers, like Vashti, had always held it foolish to visit the surface of the earth. Air-ships might be necessary, but what was the good of going out for mere curiosity and crawling along for a mile or two in a terrestrial motor? The habit was vulgar and perhaps faintly improper: it was unproductive of ideas, and had no connection with the habits that really mattered. So respirators were abolished, and with them, of course, the terrestrial motors, and except for a few lecturers, who complained that they were debarred access to their subject-matter, the development was accepted quietly. Those who still wanted

to know what the earth was like had after all only to listen to some gramophone, or to look into some cinematophote. And even the lecturers acquiesced when they found that a lecture on the sea was none the less stimulating when compiled out of other lectures that had already been delivered on the same subject. "Beware of first-hand ideas!" exclaimed one of the most advanced of them. "First-hand ideas do not really exist. They are but the physical impressions produced by love and fear, and on this gross foundation who could erect a philosophy? Let your ideas be second-hand, and if possible tenth-hand, for then they will be far removed from that disturbing element—direct observation. Do not learn anything about this subject of mine—the French Revolution. Learn instead what I think that Enicharmon thought Urizen thought Gutch thought Ho-Yung thought Chi-Bo-Sing thought Lafcadio Hearn thought Carlyle thought Mirabeau said about the French Revolution. Through the medium of these eight great minds, the blood that was shed at Paris and the windows that were broken at Versailles will be clarified to an idea which you may employ most profitably in your daily lives. But be sure that the intermediates are many and varied, for in history one authority exists to counteract another. Urizen must counteract the skepticism of Ho-Yung and Enicharmon, I must myself counteract the impetuosity of Gutch. You who listen to me are in a better position to judge about the French Revolution than I am. Your descendants will be even in a better position than you, for they will learn what you think I think, and yet another intermediate will be added to the chain. And in time"—his voice rose—"there will come a generation that has got beyond facts, beyond impressions, a generation absolutely colorless, a generation

'seraphically free
From taint of personality,'

which will see the French Revolution not as it happened, nor as they would like it to have happened, but as it would have happened, had it taken place in the days of the Machine."

Tremendous applause greeted this lecture, which did but voice a feeling already latent in the minds of men—a feeling that terrestrial facts must be ignored, and that the abolition of respirators was a positive gain. It was even suggested that air-ships should be abolished too. This was not done, because air-ships had somehow worked themselves into the Machine's system. But year by year they were used less, and mentioned less by thoughtful men.

The second great development was the reëstablishment of religion.

This, too, had been voiced in the celebrated lecture. No one could mistake the reverent tone in which the peroration had concluded, and it awakened a responsive echo in the heart of each. Those who had long worshiped silently, now began to talk. They described the strange feeling of peace that came over them when they handled the Book of the Machine, the pleasure that it was to repeat certain numerals out of it, however little meaning those numerals conveyed to the outward ear, the ecstasy of touching a button, however unimportant, or of ringing an electric bell, however superfluously.

"The Machine," they exclaimed, "feeds us and clothes us and houses us; through it we speak to one another, through it we see one another, in it we have our being. The Machine is the friend of ideas and the enemy of superstition: the Machine is omnipotent, eternal; blessed is the Machine." And before long this allocution was printed on the first page of the Book, and in subsequent editions the ritual swelled into a complicated system of praise and prayer. The word "religion" was sedulously

avoided, and in theory the Machine was still the creation and the implement of man. But in practice all, save a few retrogrades, worshiped it as divine. Nor was it worshiped in unity. One believer would be chiefly impressed by the blue optic plates, through which he saw other believers; another by the mending apparatus, which sinful Kuno had compared to worms; another by the lifts, another by the Book. And each would pray to this or to that, and ask it to intercede for him with the Machine as a whole. Persecution—that also was present. It did not break out, for reasons that will be set forward shortly. But it was latent, and all who did not accept the minimum known as "undenominational Mechanism" lived in danger of Homelessness, which means death, as we know.

To attribute these two great developments to the Central Committee, is to take a very narrow view of civilization. The Central Committee announced the developments, it is true, but they were no more the cause of them than were the kings of the imperialistic period the cause of war. Rather did they yield to some invincible pressure, which came no one knew whither, and which, when gratified, was succeeded by some new pressure equally invincible. To such a state of affairs it is convenient to give the name of progress. No one confessed the Machine was out of hand. Year by year it was served with increased efficiency and decreased intelligence. The better a man knew his own duties upon it, the less he understood the duties of his neighbor, and in all the world there was not one who understood the monster as a whole. Those master brains had perished. They had left full directions, it is true, and their successors had each of them mastered a portion of those directions. But Humanity, in its desire for comfort, had over-reached itself. It had exploited the riches of nature too far. Quietly and complacently, it was sink-

ing into decadence, and progress had come to mean the progress of the Machine.

As for Vashti, her life went peacefully forward until the final disaster. She made her room dark and slept; she awoke and made the room light. She lectured and attended lectures. She exchanged ideas with her innumerable friends and believed she was growing more spiritual. At times a friend was granted Euthanasia, and left his or her room for the homelessness that is beyond all human conception. Vashti did not much mind. After an unsuccessful lecture, she would sometimes ask for Euthanasia herself. But the death-rate was not permitted to exceed the birth-rate, and the Machine had hitherto refused it to her.

The troubles began quietly, long before she was conscious of them.

One day she was astonished at receiving a message from her son. They never communicated, having nothing in common, and she had only heard indirectly that he was still alive, and had been transferred from the northern hemisphere, where he had behaved so mischievously, to the southern—indeed, to a room not far from her own.

"Does he want me to visit him?" she thought. "Never again, never. And I have not the time."

No, it was madness of another kind.

He refused to visualize his face upon the blue plate, and speaking out of the darkness with solemnity said:

"The Machine stops."

"What do you say?"

"The Machine is stopping, I know it, I know the signs."

She burst into a peal of laughter. He heard her and was angry, and they spoke no more.

"Can you imagine anything more absurd?" she cried to a friend. "A man who was my son believes that the Machine is stopping. It would be impious if it was not mad."

"The Machine is stopping?" her friend replied. "What does that mean? The phrase conveys nothing to me."

"Nor to me."

"He does not refer, I suppose, to the trouble there has been lately with the music?"

"Oh, no, of course not. Let us talk about music."

"Have you complained to the authorities?"

"Yes, and they say it wants mending, and referred me to the Committee of the Mending Apparatus. I complained of those curious gasping sighs that disfigure the symphonies of the Brisbane school. They sound like some one in pain. The Committee of the Mending Apparatus say that it shall be remedied shortly."

Obscurely worried, she resumed her life. For one thing, the defect in the music irritated her. For another thing, she could not forget Kuno's speech. If he had known that the music was out of repair—he could not know it, for he detested music—if he had known that it was wrong, "the Machine stops" was exactly the venomous sort of remark he would have made. Of course he had made it at a venture, but the coincidence annoyed her, and she spoke with some petulance to the Committee of the Mending Apparatus.

They replied, as before, that the defect would be set right shortly.

"Shortly! At once!" she retorted. "Why should I be worried by imperfect music? Things are always put right at once. If you do not mend it at once, I shall complain to the Central Committee."

"No personal complaints are received by the Central Committee," the Committee of the Mending Apparatus replied.

"Through whom am I to make my complaint, then?"

"Through us."

"I complain then."

"Your complaint shall be forwarded in its turn."

"Have others complained?"

This question was unmechanical, and the Committee of the Mending Apparatus refused to answer it.

"It is too bad!" she exclaimed to another of her friends. "There never was such an unfortunate woman as myself. I can never be sure of my music now. It gets worse and worse each time I summon it."

"I too have my troubles," the friend replied. "Sometimes my ideas are interrupted by a slight jarring noise."

"What is it?"

"I do not know whether it is inside my head, or inside the wall."

"Complain, in either case."

"I have complained, and my complaint will be forwarded in its turn to the Central Committee."

Time passed, and they resented the defects no longer. The defects had not been remedied, but the human tissues in that latter day had become so subservient, that they readily adapted themselves to every caprice of the Machine. The sigh at the crisis of the Brisbane symphony no longer irritated Vashti; she accepted it as part of the melody. The jarring noise, whether in the head or in the wall, was no longer resented by her friend. And so with the moldy artificial fruit, so with the bath water that began to stink, so with the defective rhymes that the poetry machine had taken to emit. All were bitterly complained of at first, and then acquiesced in and forgotten. Things went from bad to worse unchallenged.

It was otherwise with the failure of the sleeping apparatus. That was a more serious stoppage. There came a day when over the whole world—in Sumatra, in Wessex, in the innumerable cities of Courland and Brazil—the beds, when summoned by their tired owners, failed to

appear. It may seem a ludicrous matter, but from it we may date the collapse of humanity. The Committee responsible for the failure was assailed by complainants, whom it referred, as usual, to the Committee of the Mending Apparatus, who in its turn assured them that their complaints would be forwarded to the Central Committee. But the discontent grew, for mankind was not yet sufficiently adaptable to do without sleeping.

"Some one is meddling with the Machine—" they began.

"Some one is trying to make himself king, to reintroduce the personal element."

"Punish that man with Homelessness."

"To the rescue! Avenge the Machine! Avenge the Machine!"

"War! Kill the man!"

But the Committee of the Mending Apparatus now came forward, and allayed the panic with well-chosen words. It confessed that the Mending Apparatus was itself in need of repair.

The effect of this frank confession was admirable.

"Of course," said a famous lecturer—he of the French Revolution, who gilded each new decay with splendor—"of course we shall not press our complaints now. The Mending Apparatus has treated us so well in the past that we all sympathize with it, and will wait patiently for its recovery. In its own good time it will resume its duties. Meanwhile let us do without our beds, our tabloids, our other little wants. Such, I feel sure, would be the wish of the Machine."

Thousands of miles away his audience applauded. The Machine still linked them. Under the seas, beneath the roots of the mountains, ran the wires through which they saw and heard, the enormous eyes and ears that were their heritage, and the hum of many workings clothed

their thoughts in one garment of subserviency. Only the old and the sick remained ungrateful, for it was rumored that Euthanasia, too, was out of order, and that pain had reappeared among men.

It became difficult to read. A blight entered the atmosphere and dulled its luminosity. At times Vashti could scarcely see across her room. The air, too, was foul. Loud were the complaints, impotent the remedies, heroic the tone of the lecturer as he cried: "Courage, courage! What matter so long as the Machine goes on? To it the darkness and the light are one." And though things improved again after a time, the old brilliancy was never recaptured, and humanity never recovered from its entrance into twilight. There was an hysterical talk of "measures," of "provisional dictatorship," and the inhabitants of Sumatra were asked to familiarize themselves with the workings of the central power station, the said power station being situated in France. But for the most part panic reigned, and men spent their strength praying to their Books, tangible proofs of the Machine's omnipotence. There were gradations of terror—at times came rumors of hope—the Mending Apparatus was almost mended—the enemies of the Machine had been got under—new "nerve-centers" were evolving which would do the work even more magnificently than before. But there came a day when, without the slightest warning, without any previous hint of feebleness, the entire communication-system broke down, all over the world, and the world, as they understood it, ended.

Vashti was lecturing at the time and her earlier remarks had been punctuated with applause. As she proceeded the audience became silent, and at the conclusion there was no sound. Somewhat displeased, she called to a friend who was a specialist in sympathy. No sound: doubtless the friend was sleeping. And so with the next friend whom

she tried to summon, and so with the next, until she remembered Kuno's cryptic remark, "The Machine stops."

The phrase still conveyed nothing. If Eternity was stopping it would of course be set going shortly.

For example, there was still a little light and air—the atmosphere had improved a few hours previously. There was still the Book, and while there was the Book there was security.

Then she broke down, for with the cessation of activity came an unexpected terror—silence.

She had never known silence, and the coming of it nearly killed her—it did kill many thousands of people outright. Ever since her birth she had been surrounded by the steady hum. It was to the ear what artificial air was to the lungs, and agonizing pains shot across her head. And scarcely knowing what she did, she stumbled forward and pressed the unfamiliar button, the one that opened the door of her cell.

Now the door of the cell worked on a simple hinge of its own. It was not connected with the central power station, dying far away in France. It opened, rousing immoderate hopes in Vashti, for she thought that the Machine had been mended. It opened, and she saw the dim tunnel that curved far away towards freedom. One look, and then she shrank back. For the tunnel was full of people—she was almost the last in that city to have taken alarm.

People at any time repelled her, and these were nightmares from her worst dreams. People were crawling about, people were screaming, whimpering, gasping for breath, touching each other, vanishing in the dark, and ever and anon being pushed off the platform on to the live rail. Some were fighting round the electric bells, trying to summon trains which could not be summoned. Others were

yelling for Euthanasia or for respirators, or blaspheming the Machine. Others stood at the doors of their cells fearing, like herself, either to stop in them or to leave them. And behind all the uproar was silence—the silence which is the voice of the earth and of the generations who have gone.

No—it was worse than solitude. She closed the door again and sat down to wait for the end. The disintegration went on, accompanied by horrible cracks and rumbling. The valves that restrained the Medical Apparatus must have been weakened, for it ruptured and hung hideously from the ceiling. The floor heaved and fell and flung her from her chair. A tube oozed towards her serpent fashion. And at last the final horror approached—light began to ebb, and she knew that civilization's long day was closing.

She whirled round, praying to be saved from this, at any rate, kissing the Book, pressing button after button. The uproar outside was increasing, and even penetrated the wall. Slowly the brilliancy of her cell was dimmed, the reflections faded from her metal switches. Now she could not see the reading-stand, now not the Book, though she held it in her hand. Light followed the flight of sound, air was following light, and the original void returned to the cavern from which it had been so long excluded. Vashti continued to whirl, like the devotees of an earlier religion, screaming, praying, striking at the buttons with bleeding hands.

It was thus that she opened her prison and escaped—escaped in the spirit: at least so it seems to me, ere my meditation closes. That she escapes in the body—I cannot perceive that. She struck, by chance, the switch that released the door, and the rush of foul air on her skin, the loud throbbing whispers in her ears, told her that she was facing the tunnel again, and that tremendous platform

on which she had seen men fighting. They were not fighting now. Only the whispers remained, and the little whimpering groans. They were dying by hundreds out in the dark.

She burst into tears.

Tears answered her.

They wept for humanity, those two, not for themselves. They could not bear that this should be the end. Ere silence was completed their hearts were opened, and they knew what had been important on the earth. Man, the flower of all flesh, the noblest of all creatures visible, man who had once made god in his image, and had mirrored his strength on the constellations, beautiful naked man was dying, strangled in the garments that he had woven. Century after century had he toiled, and here was his reward. Truly the garment had seemed heavenly at first, shot with the colors of culture, sewn with the threads of self-denial. And heavenly it had been so long as it was a garment and no more, so long as man could shed it at will and live by the essence that is his soul, and the essence, equally divine, that is his body. The sin against the body—it was for that they wept in chief; the centuries of wrong against the muscles and the nerves, and those five portals by which we can alone apprehend—glozing it over with talk of evolution, until the body was white pap, the home of ideas as colorless, last sloshy stirrings of a spirit that had grasped the stars.

"Where are you?" she sobbed.

His voice in the darkness said, "Here."

"Is there any hope, Kuno?"

"None for us."

"Where are you?"

She crawled towards him over the bodies of the dead. His blood spurted over her hands.

"Quicker," he gasped, "I am dying—but we touch, we talk, not through the Machine."

He kissed her.

"We have come back to our own. We die, but we have recaptured life, as it was in Wessex, when Aelfrid overthrew the Danes. We know what they know outside, they who dwelt in the cloud that is the color of a pearl."

"But, Kuno, is it true? Are there still men on the surface of the earth? Is this—this tunnel, this poisoned darkness—really not the end?"

He replied:

"I have seen them, spoken to them, loved them. They are hiding in the mist and the ferns until our civilization stops. Today they are the Homeless—tomorrow—"

"Oh, tomorrow—some fool will start the Machine again, tomorrow."

"Never," said Kuno, "never. Humanity has learnt its lesson."

As he spoke, the whole city was broken like a honeycomb. An air-ship had sailed in through the vomitory into a ruined wharf. It crashed downwards, exploding as it went, rending gallery after gallery with its wings of steel. For a moment they saw the nations of the dead, and, before they joined them, scraps of the untainted sky.

A FAR CRY [1]

by Zona Gale

Zona Gale was born in Wisconsin in 1874. Having graduated from the University of Wisconsin she engaged in newspaper work, for a time being on the staff of the *New York World*. She soon devoted herself to fiction, verse, and plays. Among her titles are *Miss Lulu Bett, Faint Perfume,* and *Yellow Gentians and Blue*. She was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for her dramatization of *Miss Lulu Bett,* produced in New York, 1920.

Among the red porch chairs Elmer Dasher sat in a denim swing which leniently dissented. He did not seem like a man who would sit and swing; such a molested-looking man.

Hands parted the curtains of a window behind him and hung there a pink card on which was printed "Ice." It was evening, but tomorrow morning's slumber must not be flawed by this task. Immediately the hands appeared upon the porch. Mrs. Dasher's hands wore all the expression that she had. They seemed to have done so much. Her face had experienced so little.

"Hot," said she.

"Why shouldn't it be? It's summer time," said Elmer Dasher.

He tilted the swing, and the spirited disclaimer of the frame did not annoy them. She rocked and they did not hear the creaking board. Near the cement pavement the sprinkler fizzed and spurted; they did not observe that

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in order to avoid it, passers were obliged to make a detour under the maples.

Elmer Dasher took his watch and held it. The last bright cloud hung on Patch Hill and stained the air. Shadow floated and fell. For five minutes while airy dissolution ran upon the light, Mr. Dasher eyed the dial. Then he descended the steps and turned off the city water. Unconscious that it was a triumph of social evolution for a community to be organized like that, and without a casual glance at the elemental glory of the sunset, he returned to his swing.

Ludlow, his neighbor, crossed the connecting lawns and desired to know how everything was. Ludlow had a woman's eyes. Elmer Dasher held him in subconscious contempt, for he made disconcerting observations, such as he made now to Dasher's inevitable reply that everything was complete, complete:

"Sometimes I wonder why Patch Grove doesn't collapse and slide down Patch Hill and pile up in the valley."

Dasher inquired why on earth it should do that. He knew his town; "hard-boiled business, hard-boiled recreation, hard-boiled family life," he had once summed it up; but he could not imagine why business blocks, houses, garages, and folk should ever give way, of their own futility, and slide down to the valley of the Patch, the brown river. Ludlow's long harangue only confused him.

"You won't find any better place to live," he indignantly defended. "I'm afraid not," said Ludlow, sighed, mentioned the thunder heads in the west, and went home.

"Queer duck," Elmer Dasher thought.

Abruptly, distinctly, he heard a cry. He could not divine its direction nor tell whether it was the voice of man or woman. It might have been a signal, very clear, though from a distance. He looked at his wife but she,

with moving lips, was counting something and had heard nothing. He thought that the boys must be playing ball on the school grounds, and he tilted the swing again.

The hall gas flared up. Over her who had lighted it the warm tide surged, showed her pointed face, her thin arms —Geraldine Dasher, a name to which her faint self of forty bore no relation. She emerged, announced a destination, was met by "Why not ever sit down here at home with us?" and pregnable, without resentment, sank to the top step.

Within the houses, behind the dying brilliance of the brick walls, girls were dressing. In Patch Grove no one dressed before dinner. The virginity of the toilette was preserved for its main purpose. On the porches sat those who did not dress for the evening any more. In many of these the desire to give life had changed to a dynamic hostility to those already alive. As with the Dashers:

"Hot." "Why shouldn't it be? It's summer time." "That isn't funny." "My dear, nothing is funny to you." "My clothes are—they're so funny I don't like to go to church." "The churches have gone to the dogs. Best keep out of them." "You would insult my religion!" And so on to: "I'm rather sick of this whole thing." Whereon Geraldine cried abruptly: "How do you think I feel about that?" and laughed harshly, so that a silence fell.

In their silence a telegram was given over the telephone in the hall. Dasher took the message, came back, his face sagging with concern, and said:

"Mamma, Katy's sick. She wants us to go to the city and bring the boy home with us."

Mrs. Dasher asked for details which had not been given, made and rejected fractions of plans, objected. Dasher said: "Nonsense. Katy's the only niece I've got in the world. Going, too, Jerry? Don't keep us waiting."

The enormous night received the little car. Ten miles of dusky cornland, warm with the breath of the day; eight miles of city streets, sleepy with heat, nervous with light, washed by a thin black stream of beings, Pearl City traffic formed the veins of some vast undivined body. That body seemed to have a voice, raucous, unresting. The powers of that body were evident—to give death, to give life, to sin, to rejoice, to agonize. Was there no more to that unknown being? Could it only bellow with its body while its veins flowed with the traffic?

Katy was at a hospital and with her the little boy, wondering, frail. The ward was shared with a woman, a Bohemian, red and black. Katy was a yellow shadow on a pillow. Old in cell and in spirit she said: "Don't bother to stay. He'll be here. But he can't work and see to the boy, too. Me? I don't know and I don't care." She lay like a little animal left too long in a trap to be watching any more.

Elmer Dasher was shaken, said, "But my God, Katy"; and Katy, turning her head fretfully from him, was caught by the aspect of the Bohemian woman, and cried out. The Bohemian woman was sitting erect and trying terribly for breath. No nurse was there, the passages were quiet. The Dashers, always lax, uncentered, were thrown into distraction. Elmer ran and rang and called. It was Mrs. Dasher who reached the woman and, in some deep impulse to physical contact, held her as she died. Mrs. Dasher kept saying: "I don't understand this. I don't understand this."

Jerry caught up the terrified little boy, ran by the nurse who was moving upon the room, crouched in the tonneau, and hugged the child. He wept, was stilled, and later roused to faint interests. She was stirred by his quiet, then by his motion. While they waited, she sought

for ways to give him protection. Passers glanced at them and it flashed to her: They think he's mine. She adjusted his collar and said in an admirably imitated abstraction: "Yes, darling."

At last her father and mother came crossing the street. To Jerry they seemed detached and of a familiarity strange and passionate, such as she felt in saying over her own name.

"I don't understand that," Mrs. Dasher was still saying weakly. In the seat beside her husband she wept and seemed rapt, unaware of anything save that which had just happened. Elmer Dasher was silent, but wholly in the body, as was clear when he cursed in a traffic crisis.

This crisis he assumed to have been imagined: He heard a car, with a strange siren, a faint melodious siren; a car seeking, he thought, to pass him, and nearly succeeding. Dasher could hear the silver alternation, a cadence such as three pipes might give, softly blown. When had a man ever devised a siren like that? "Some music hound," thought Dasher. And when a tight place narrowed in before him and the light cry of insistence followed close, he drew far to the right to let the fellow pass. The fellow did not pass. Amazed, as he looked back, Dasher saw the street momentarily empty. "Must have been the fire whistle," Dasher thought, swore, and slid back into the channel.

They drew into the country, into the tender vacant air of fields. Now emerged the sky, which in town they had forgotten. The sky was void of stars. To the southwest were thrusts of lightning, incessant, at innocent play, unconcerned with any fruit of death. A faint huskiness came deepening, of thunder.

"What's that?" the child asked and, grown shyly accustomed, questioned of fireflies, of miasma, of the smell

of honey and hay. These questions gave Jerry rapture. His breath and his brushing eyelash gave her rapture. The child fell asleep, and in dear discomfort Jerry held him; for mile upon mile she held him and dreaded the ride's end.

She felt a lift of pleasure when the car was stalled. At the foot of a sharp slope up to a roadbed the car stopped. Elmer Dasher, who could not so much as set a hinge on a door, was helpless. He lifted the hood, produced tools, said names of parts; but it was plain that he was helpless. No farmstead light was near and they set themselves to wait for passers. It was a road little frequented. And now the high black clouds were shot with flame.

They faced a meadow made limitless by night. The life of the dark was there, the dark peopled by rustle, breath, odor. In the stillness these influences came confidently to the car. The night breathed, and along its vast invisible veins coursed some faint fluid, tincturing the darkness, flowing through the little bodies of men.

Suddenly Elmer Dasher felt a frightful nostalgia. Home, home! He wanted to be at home. But when he thought of his house, his porch with red chairs, it was not these that he wanted. Home. Some core of the world seemed to emerge and demand him. Where did he want to go?

Far away, as if from another meadow under another night, there came a call, of no remembered bird. A bird call which fused with the rising wind, threaded the thunder, haunted the ear, and died. It voiced his nostalgia, it was pure and pleading. It bore an echo of unbearable sweetness. Or was it a bird call? He thought now that it might have been a wavering engine whistle. . . . Far down the curve of the railroad across the distant swamp, a yellow eye outrayed in the first rain.

"The 'way freight," said Elmer Dasher. "It's none too good for us. We'll signal them, and if they row we'll report them to the directors!"

The highway was level with the fields. To the fields' edge they rolled their car, an ancient servant, and left it locked in darkness; with its lamps they lighted their way and flagged the freight train. In magnificent languor, like a train of the Orient, the thundering thing rolled indolently down and stopped. A blown torch brushed out a little pool of light. A Patch Grove voice hailed them, exclaimed, bade them climb aboard. Received into the warm cave of the cab, these four blinked at the red throat of the firebox and felt the rich reprieve of some convalescence.

The enormous night held the little train. The enormous sky held the little storm. Standing in the gangway Elmer Dasher threw back his head and took the hour. Motion, roar, electricity blue on the metal, thunder of wheel and of cloud, and he in their midst. He felt in flight over farther spaces. They swept by a steel plant, saw the belch and glare, made out men and mounds of slag. One of the sheds stood drenched in the red beauty of the pouring, and naked figures flowered from wild color. In that flash were the tumult of farther industry, roar of innumerable trains, glitter of all the cities, their veins flowing with men and women in sin, joy, anguish. He was feeling all that there was to feel! He could have cried a challenge as the engine went challenging the lit blackness.

But why did the engineer blow the whistle, running through open country? Or *did* he blow the whistle? He was sitting quietly on the seat, his attention on the track. One hand lay on his knee and one on the windowsill. The engine whistle was not blown! That insistent call that seemed like the voice of their flight, it came toward them

from some horizon. What horizon? Who was calling? Calling whom? Beauty and anguish flowed together in Elmer Dasher. He felt drunkenness, incredibly enhanced.

"The glory of the Lord—eh, old girl?" he shouted. No one heard him.

On the fireman's seat Mrs. Dasher, cowering with covered eyes, looked round at him. She had not heard what he said, had not seen what he saw, had felt nothing that he felt, had been puzzled by no cry; but her face held its own emotion, wore now as much experience as her hands.

"Elmer," she cried, "I don't understand what happened to her and I don't believe I ever shall."

But this he did not hear. "The glory of the Lord, by the great horn spoon!" he bellowed, and looked about. Neither death nor the fury of the hour occupied Jerry. In the thunder of the engine and of the storm, she had found that the child clutched at her.

Before midnight they were dry in their rooms and the little boy was sleeping. Elmer Dasher's exaltation, his wife's pity and terror, Jerry's brief motherhood, all boxed dry in their rooms.

The storm cleared and left the air sultry, intolerable. Dasher could not sleep. He went downstairs and sat in the swing. Ludlow was moving about the lawn, barefooted in the drenched grass. He came to the Dashers' verandah rail.

"Been up in town, have you?" he said. "I tell you, if there's a reason why Patch Grove should collapse and slide into the valley, Pearl City ought to drop into the ground with no warning. Ought to disappear from the human eye."

Something shook Elmer Dasher. He seemed to re-

member that this destiny of man he had recently been stirred to resist. But automatically he replied:

"You won't find a better city anywhere than Pearl."

"I'm afraid not," said Ludlow, and went home.

Faintly, a far horn which would wake few, Elmer Dasher heard the cry again. In it was the nostalgia of the night, of the world, of some hidden being striving to be heard. But of this cry he could not divine direction or meaning. It might have been a signal or a challenge. To whom? And from where? Boys could not be playing ball on the school grounds now. . . .

He moved nervously in his swing and the frame dissented leniently. He felt an instant and acute relief and comfortably concluded that this faint squeak was all that he had noted.

Hearing this squeak, his wife descended, quavered, "That you, Elmer?" and came to her rocking chair on its creaking board. The moon in its third quarter, a trinket of silver gilt, was tilted above the elm, but the Dashers did not observe. Nor did they note the clean new anger of the second storm cutting its low way along the west.

Beneath the hall burner Jerry passed, came to the threshold, and when her mother said "Better sit down," emerged and obeyed.

"I don't understand it and I never shall," said Mrs. Dasher heavily.

"Don't say that again!" Elmer Dasher cried. "There isn't a woman in the world that'll keep on saying the same thing over and over the way you will."

"I won't be here long to say anything. I'm sick of the whole thing."

Jerry interposed: "It's hot again, isn't it?" She heard: "Why shouldn't it be? It's summer time." And: "Can anybody see whether I hung up the ice card?"

THE FIRST AND THE LAST [1]

by JOHN GALSWORTHY

I

"So the last shall be first, and the first last."—HOLY WRIT.

JOHN GALSWORTHY was born in England in 1867. He took a degree in law at Oxford and was admitted to the bar, but dropped his practice for extensive travel and writing. His sequence of novels known as *The Forsyte Saga* is a remarkable detailed picture of upper middle-class society during the later Victorian and Edwardian eras. Fame came slowly to him, but he now has one of the greatest literary audiences of the present day. He is always the propagandist and is intensely alive to the injustices of our social order. Of his style Conrad wrote: "It is the style of a man whose sympathy with mankind is too genuine to allow him the smallest gratification of his vanity at the cost of his fellow creatures . . . sufficiently pointed to carry deep his remorseless irony and grave enough to be the dignified vehicle of his profound compassion." Among his many fine books are *Loyalties, The Inn of Tranquillity,* and *Caravan.*

IT WAS a dark room at that hour of six in the evening, when just the single oil reading-lamp under its green shade let fall a dapple of light over the Turkey carpet; over the covers of books taken out of the book-shelves, and the open pages of the one selected; over the deep blue and gold of the coffee service on the little old stool with its Oriental embroidery. Very dark in the winter, with drawn curtains, many rows of leather-bound volumes, oak-pan-

[1] From *Caravan* by John Galsworthy. Copyright, 1925, by Charles Scribner's Sons. By permission of the publishers.

eled walls and ceiling. So large, too, that the lighted spot before the fire where he sat was just an oasis. But that was what Keith Darrant liked, after his day's work—the hard early morning study of his "cases," the fret and strain of the day in court; it was his rest, these two hours before dinner, with books, coffee, a pipe, and sometimes a nap. In red Turkish slippers and his old brown velvet coat, he was well suited to that framing of glow and darkness. A painter would have seized avidly on his clear-cut, yellowish face, with its black eyebrows twisting up over eyes—gray or brown, one could hardly tell, and its dark grizzling hair still plentiful, in spite of those daily hours of wig. He seldom thought of his work while he sat there, throwing off with practised ease the strain of that long attention to the multiple threads of argument and evidence to be disentangled—work profoundly interesting, as a rule, to his clear intellect, trained to almost instinctive rejection of all but the essential, to selection of what was legally vital out of the mass of confused tactical and human detail presented to his scrutiny; yet sometimes tedious and wearing. As for instance today, when he had suspected his client of perjury, and was almost convinced that he must throw up his brief. He had disliked the weak-looking, white-faced fellow from the first, and his nervous, shifty answers, his prominent startled eyes—a type too common in these days of canting tolerations and weak humanitarianism; no good, no good!

Of the three books he had taken down, a volume of Voltaire—curious fascination that Frenchman had, for all his destructive irony!—a volume of Burton's travels, and Stevenson's *New Arabian Nights*, he had pitched upon the last. He felt, that evening, the want of something seda-

tive, a desire to rest from thought of any kind. The court had been crowded, stuffy; the air, as he walked home, soft, sou'-westerly, charged with coming moisture, no quality of vigor in it; he felt relaxed, tired, even nervy, and for once the loneliness of his house seemed strange and comfortless.

Lowering the lamp, he turned his face towards the fire. Perhaps he would get a sleep before that boring dinner at the Tellassons'. He wished it were vacation, and Maisie back from school. A widower for many years, he had lost the habit of a woman about him; yet tonight he had a positive yearning for the society of his young daughter, with her quick ways, and bright, dark eyes. Curious what perpetual need of a woman some men had! His brother Laurence—wasted—all through women—atrophy of will-power! A man on the edge of things; living from hand to mouth; his gifts all down at heel! One would have thought the Scottish strain might have saved him; and yet, when a Scotsman did begin to go downhill, who could go faster? Curious that their mother's blood should have worked so differently in her two sons. He himself had always felt he owed all his success to it.

His thoughts went off at a tangent to a certain issue troubling his legal conscience. He had not wavered in the usual assumption of omniscience, but he was by no means sure that he had given right advice. Well! without that power to decide and hold to decision in spite of misgiving, one would never have been fit for one's position at the Bar, never have been fit for anything. The longer he lived, the more certain he became of the prime necessity of virile and decisive action in all the affairs of life. A word and a blow—and the blow first! Doubts, hesitation, sentiment —the muling and puking of this twilight age—! And

there welled up on his handsome face a smile that was almost devilish—the tricks of firelight are so many! It faded again in sheer drowsiness; he slept. . . .

He woke with a start, having a feeling of something out beyond the light, and without turning his head said: "What's that?" There came a sound as if somebody had caught his breath. He turned up the lamp.

"Who's there?"

A voice over by the door answered:

"Only I—Larry."

Something in the tone, or perhaps just being startled out of sleep like this, made him shiver. He said:

"I was asleep. Come in!"

It was noticeable that he did not get up, or even turn his head, now that he knew who it was, but waited, his half-closed eyes fixed on the fire, for his brother to come forward. A visit from Laurence was not an unmixed blessing. He could hear him breathing, and became conscious of a scent of whisky. Why could not the fellow at least abstain when he was coming here! It was so childish, so lacking in any sense of proportion or of decency! And he said sharply:

"Well, Larry, what is it?"

It was always something. He often wondered at the strength of that sense of trusteeship, which kept him still tolerant of the troubles, amenable to the petitions of this brother of his; or was it just "blood" feeling, a Highland sense of loyalty to kith and kin; an old-time quality which judgment and half his instincts told him was weakness, but which, in spite of all, bound him to the distressful fellow? Was he drunk now, that he kept lurking out there by the door? And he said less sharply:

"Why don't you come and sit down?"

He was coming now, avoiding the light, skirting along

the walls just beyond the radiance of the lamp, his feet and legs to the waist brightly lighted, but his face disintegrated in shadow, like the face of a dark ghost.

"Are you ill, man?"

Still no answer, save a shake of that head, and the passing up of a hand, out of the light, to the ghostly forehead under the disheveled hair. The scent of whisky was stronger now; and Keith thought:

"He really is drunk. Nice thing for the new butler to see! If he can't behave—"

The figure against the wall heaved a sigh—so truly from an overburdened heart that Keith was conscious with a certain dismay of not having yet fathomed the cause of this uncanny silence. He got up, and, back to the fire, said with a brutality born of nerves rather than design:

"What is it, man? Have you committed a murder, that you stand there dumb as a fish?"

For a second no answer at all, not even of breathing; then, just the whisper:

"Yes."

The sense of unreality which so helps one at moments of disaster enabled Keith to say vigorously:

"By Jove! You *have* been drinking!"

But it passed at once into deadly apprehension.

"What do you mean? Come here, where I can see you. What's the matter with you, Larry?"

With a sudden lurch and dive, his brother left the shelter of the shadow, and sank into a chair in the circle of light. And another long, broken sigh escaped him.

"There's nothing the matter with me, Keith! It's true!"

Keith stepped quickly forward, and stared down into his brother's face; and instantly he saw that it *was* true. No one could have simulated the look in those eyes—of horrified wonder, as if they would never again get on terms

with the face to which they belonged. To see them squeezed the heart—only real misery could look like that. Then that sudden pity became angry bewilderment.

"What in God's name is this nonsense?"

But it was significant that he lowered his voice; went over to the door, too, to see if it were shut. Laurence had drawn his chair forward, huddling over the fire—a thin figure, a worn, high-cheek-boned face with deep-sunk blue eyes, and wavy hair all ruffled, a face that still had a certain beauty. Putting a hand on that lean shoulder, Keith said:

"Come, Larry! Pull yourself together, and drop exaggeration."

"It's true, I tell you; I've killed a man."

The noisy violence of that outburst acted like a douche. What was the fellow about—shouting out such words! But suddenly Laurence lifted his hands and wrung them. The gesture was so utterly painful that it drew a quiver from Keith's face.

"Why did you come here," he said, "and tell *me* this?"

Larry's face was really unearthly sometimes, such strange gleams passed up on to it!

"Whom else should I tell? I came to know what I'm to do, Keith. Give myself up, or what?"

At that sudden introduction of the practical, Keith felt his heart twitch. Was it then as real as all that? But he said, very quietly:

"Just tell me— How did it come about, this—affair?"

That question linked the dark, gruesome, fantastic nightmare on to actuality.

"When did it happen?"

"Last night."

In Larry's face there was—there had always been—

something childishly truthful. He would never stand a chance in court! And Keith said:

"How? Where? You'd better tell me quietly from the beginning. Drink this coffee; it'll clear your head."

Laurence took the little blue cup and drained it.

"Yes," he said. "It's like this, Keith. There's a girl I've known for some months now—"

Women! And Keith said between his teeth: "Well?"

"Her father was a Pole who died over here when she was sixteen, and left her all alone. A man called Walenn, a mongrel American, living in the same house, married her, or pretended to—she's very pretty, Keith—he left her with a baby six months old, and another coming. That one died, and she did nearly. Then she starved till another fellow took her on. She lived with him two years; then Walenn turned up again, and made her go back to him. The brute used to beat her black and blue, all for nothing. Then he left her again. When I met her she'd lost her elder child, too, and was taking anybody who came along."

He suddenly looked up into Keith's face.

"But I've never met a sweeter woman, nor a truer, that I swear. Woman! She's only twenty now! When I went to her last night that brute—that Walenn—had found her out again; and when he came for me, swaggering and bullying— Look!" he touched a dark mark on his forehead. —"I took his throat in my hands, and when I let go—"

"Yes?"

"Dead. I never knew till afterwards that she was hanging on to him behind."

Again he made that gesture—wringing his hands.

In a hard voice Keith said:

"What did you do then?"

"We sat by it a long time. Then I carried it on my back down the street, round a corner to an archway."

"How far?"

"About fifty yards."

"Was any one—did any one see?"

"No."

"What time?"

"Three."

"And then?"

"Went back to her."

"Why—in Heaven's name?"

"She was lonely and afraid; so was I, Keith."

"Where is this place?"

"Forty-two, Borrow Street, Soho."

"And the archway?"

"Corner of Glove Lane."

"Good God! Why—I saw it in the paper!"

And seizing the journal that lay on his bureau, Keith read again that paragraph: "The body of a man was found this morning under an archway in Glove Lane, Soho. From marks about the throat suspicions of foul play are entertained. The body had apparently been robbed, and nothing was discovered leading to identification."

It was real earnest, then. Murder! His own brother! He faced round and said:

"You saw this in the paper, and dreamed it. Understand—you dreamed it!"

The wistful answer came:

"If only I had, Keith—if only I had!"

In his turn, Keith very nearly wrung his hands.

"Did you take anything from the—body?"

"This dropped while we were struggling."

It was an empty envelope with a South American postmark addressed: "Patrick Walenn, Simon's Hotel, Farrier Street, London." Again with that twitching in his heart, Keith said:

"Put it in the fire."

Then suddenly he stooped to pluck it out. By that command—he had—identified himself with this—this— But he did not pluck it out. It blackened, writhed, and vanished. And once more he said:

"What in God's name made you come here and tell *me?*"

"You know about these things. I didn't mean to kill him. I love the girl. What shall I do, Keith?"

Simple! How simple! To ask what he was to do! It was like Larry! And he said:

"You were not seen, you think?"

"It's a dark street. There was no one about."

"When did you leave this girl the second time?"

"About seven o'clock."

"Where did you go?"

"To my rooms."

"In Fitzroy Street?"

"Yes."

"Did any one see you come in?"

"No."

"What have you done since?"

"Sat there."

"Not been out?"

"No."

"Not seen the girl?"

"No."

"You don't know, then, what she's done since?"

"No."

"Would she give you away?"

"Never."

"Would she give herself away—hysteria?"

"No."

"Who knows of your relations with her?"

"No one."

"No one?"

"I don't know who should, Keith."

"Did any one see you going in last night, when you first went to her?"

"No. She lives on the ground floor. I've got keys."

"Give them to me. What else have you that connects you with her?"

"Nothing."

"In your rooms?"

"No."

"No photographs? No letters?"

"No."

"Be careful."

"Nothing."

"No one saw you going back to her the second time?"

"No."

"No one saw you leave her in the morning?"

"No."

"You were fortunate. Sit down again, man. I must think."

Think! Think out this accursed thing—so beyond all thought, and all belief. But he could not think. Not a coherent thought would come. And he began again:

"Was it his first reappearance with her?"

"Yes."

"She told you so?"

"Yes."

"How did he find out where she was?"

"I don't know."

"How drunk were you?"

"I was not drunk."

"How much had you drunk?"

"About a bottle of claret—nothing."

"You say you didn't mean to kill him?"

"No—God knows!"

"That's something. What made you choose the arch?"

"It was the first dark place."

"Did his face look as if he had been strangled?"

"Don't!"

"Did it?"

"Yes."

"Very disfigured?"

"Yes."

"Did you look to see if his clothes were marked?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Why not? My God! If you had done it—!"

"You say he was disfigured. Would he be recognizable?"

"I don't know."

"When she lived with him last—where was that?"

"I don't know for certain. Pimlico, I think."

"Not Soho?"

"No."

"How long has she been at the Soho place?"

"Nearly a year."

"Always the same rooms?"

"Yes."

"Is there any one living in that house or street who would be likely to know her as his wife?"

"I don't think so."

"What was he?"

"I should think he was a professional 'bully.'"

"I see. Spending most of his time abroad, then?"

"Yes."

"Do you know if he was known to the police?"

"I haven't heard of it."

"Now listen, Larry. When you leave here go straight home, and don't go out till I come to you, tomorrow morning. Promise that!"

"I promise."

"I've got a dinner engagement. I'll think this out. Don't drink. Don't talk! Pull yourself together."

"Don't keep me longer than you can help, Keith!"

That white face, those eyes, that shaking hand! With a twinge of pity in the midst of all the turbulence of his revolt, and fear, and disgust, Keith put his hand on his brother's shoulder, and said:

"Courage!"

And suddenly he thought: "My God! Courage! I shall want it all myself!"

II

Laurence Darrant, leaving his brother's house in the Adelphi, walked northwards, rapidly, slowly, rapidly again. For, if there are men who by force of will do one thing only at a time, there are men who from lack of will do now one thing, now another, with equal intensity. To such natures, to be gripped by the Nemesis which attends the lack of self-control is no reason for being more self-controlled. Rather does it foster their pet feeling: "What matter? Tomorrow we die!" The effort of will required to go to Keith had relieved, exhausted and exasperated him. In accordance with those three feelings was the progress of his walk. He started from the door with the fixed resolve to go home and stay there quietly till Keith came. He was in Keith's hands; Keith would know what was to be done. But he had not gone three hundred yards before he felt so utterly weary, body and soul, that if he had but had a pistol in his pocket he would have shot himself in the street. Not even the thought of the girl—this young un-

fortunate with her strange devotion, who had kept him straight these last five months, who had roused in him a depth of feeling he had never known before—would have availed against that sudden black dejection. Why go on —a waif at the mercy of his own nature, a straw blown here and there by every gust which rose in him? Why not have done with it for ever, and take it out in sleep?

He was approaching the fatal street, where he and the girl, that early morning, had spent the hours clutched together, trying in the refuge of love to forget for a moment their horror and fear. Should he go in? He had promised Keith not to. Why had he promised? He caught sight of himself in a chemist's lighted window. Miserable, shadowy brute! And he remembered suddenly a dog he had picked up once in the streets of Pera, a black-and-white creature—different from the other dogs, not one of their breed, a pariah of pariahs, who had strayed there somehow. He had taken it home to the house where he was staying, contrary to all custom of the country; had got fond of it; had shot it himself, sooner than leave it behind again to the mercies of its own kind in the streets. Twelve years ago! And those sleeve-links made of little Turkish coins he had brought back for the girl at the hairdresser's in Chancery Lane where he used to get shaved—pretty creature, like a wild rose. He had asked of her a kiss for payment. What queer emotion when she put her face forward to his lips—a sort of passionate tenderness and shame, at the softness and warmth of that flushed cheek, at her beauty and trustful gratitude. She would soon have given herself to him—that one! He had never gone there again! And to this day he did not know why he had abstained; to this day he did not know whether he were glad or sorry not to have plucked that rose. He must surely have been very different then! Queer business, life—queer,

queer business!—to go through it never knowing what you would do next. Ah! to be like Keith, steady, buttoned-up in success; a brass pot, a pillar of society! Once, as a boy, he had been within an ace of killing Keith, for sneering at him. Once in Southern Italy he had been near killing a driver who was flogging his horse. And now, that dark-faced, swinish bully who had ruined the girl he had grown to love—he had done it! Killed him! Killed a man!

He who did not want to hurt a fly. The chemist's window confronted him with the sudden thought that he had at home that which made him safe, in case they should arrest him. He would never again go out without some of those little white tablets sewn into the lining of his coat. Restful, even exhilarating thought! They said a man should not take his own life. Let *them* taste horror—those glib citizens! Let them live as that girl had lived, as millions lived all the world over, under their canting dogmas! A man might rather even take his life than watch their cursed inhumanities.

He went into the chemist's for a bromide; and, while the man was mixing it, stood resting one foot like a tired horse. The "life" he had squeezed out of that fellow! After all, a billion living creatures gave up life each day, had it squeezed out of them, mostly. And perhaps not one a day deserved death so much as that loathly fellow. Life! a breath—a flame! Nothing! Why, then, this icy clutching at his heart?

The chemist brought the draught.

"Not sleeping, sir?"

"No."

The man's eyes seemed to say: "Yes! Burning the candle at both ends—I know!" Odd life, a chemist's; pills and powders all day long, to hold the machinery of men together! Devilish odd trade!

In going out he caught the reflection of his face in a mirror; it seemed too good altogether for a man who had committed murder. There was a sort of brightness underneath, an amiability lurking about its shadows; how—how could it be the face of a man who had done what he had done? His head felt lighter now, his feet lighter; he walked rapidly again.

Curious feeling of relief and oppression all at once! Frightful—to long for company, for talk, for distraction; and—to be afraid of it! The girl—the girl and Keith were now the only persons who would not give him that feeling of dread. And, of those two—Keith was not—! Who could consort with one who was never wrong, a successful, righteous fellow; a chap built so that he knew nothing about himself, wanted to know nothing, a chap all solid actions? To be a quicksand swallowing up one's own resolutions was bad enough! But to be like Keith—all willpower, marching along, treading down his own feelings and weaknesses!— No! One could not make a comrade of a man like Keith, even if he were one's brother. The only creature in all the world was the girl. She alone knew and felt what he was feeling; would put up with him and love him whatever he did, or was done to him. He stopped and took shelter in a doorway, to light a cigarette.

He had suddenly a fearful wish to pass the archway where he had placed the body; a fearful wish that had no sense, no end in view, no anything; just an insensate craving to see the dark place again. He crossed Borrow Street to the little lane. There was only one person visible, a man on the far side with his shoulders hunched against the wind; a short, dark figure which crossed and came towards him in the flickering lamplight. What a face! Yellow, ravaged, clothed almost to the eyes in a stubbly grayish growth of beard, with blackish teeth, and haunting blood-

shot eyes. And what a figure of rags—one shoulder higher than the other, one leg a little lame, and thin! A surge of feeling came up in Laurence for this creature, more unfortunate than himself. There were lower depths than his!

"Well, brother," he said, "*you* don't look too prosperous!"

The smile which gleamed out on the man's face seemed as unlikely as a smile on a scarecrow.

"Prosperity doesn't come my way," he said in a rusty voice. "I'm a failure—always been a failure. And yet—you wouldn't think it, would you?—I was a minister of religion once."

Laurence held out a shilling. But the man shook his head.

"Keep your money," he said. "I've got more than you today, I daresay. But thank you for taking a little interest. That's worth more than money to a man that's down."

"You're right."

"Yes," the rusty voice went on; "I'd as soon die as go on living as I do. And now I've lost my self-respect. Often wondered how long a starving man could go without losing his self-respect. Not so very long. You take my word for that." And without the slightest change in the monotony of that creaking voice he added:

"Did you read of the murder? Just here. I've been looking at the place."

The words, "So have I!" leaped up to Laurence's lips; he choked them down with a sort of terror.

"I wish you better luck," he said. "Good night!" and hurried away. A sort of ghastly laughter was forcing its way up in his throat. Was every one talking of the murder he had committed? Even the very scarecrow?

III

There are some natures so constituted that, due to be hung at ten o'clock, they will play chess at eight. Such men invariably rise. They make especially good bishops, editors, judges, impresarios, Prime Ministers, money-lenders, and generals; in fact, fill with exceptional credit any position of power over their fellow-men. They have spiritual cold storage, in which are preserved their nervous systems. In such men there is little or none of that fluid sense and continuity of feeling known under those vague terms, speculation, poetry, philosophy. Men of facts and of decision switching imagination on and off at will, subordinating sentiment to reason . . . one does not think of them when watching wind ripple over cornfields, or swallows flying.

Keith Darrant had need for being of that breed during his dinner at the Tellassons'. It was just eleven when he issued from the big house in Portland Place and refrained from taking a cab. He wanted to walk that he might better think. What crude and wanton irony there was in his situation! To have been made father-confessor to a murderer, he—well on towards a judgeship! With his contempt for the kind of weakness which landed men in such abysses, he felt it all so sordid, so "impossible," that he could hardly bring his mind to bear on it at all. And yet he must, because of two powerful instincts—self-preservation and blood-loyalty.

The wind had still the sapping softness of the afternoon, but rain had held off so far. It was warm, and he unbuttoned his fur overcoat. The nature of his thoughts deepened the dark austerity of his face, whose thin, well-cut lips were always pressing together, as if, by meeting, to dispose of each thought as it came up. He moved along

the crowded pavements glumly. That air of festive conspiracy, which drops with the darkness on to lighted streets, galled him. He turned off on a darker route.

This ghastly business! Convinced of its reality, he yet could not see it. The thing existed in his mind, not as a picture, but as a piece of irrefutable evidence. Larry had not meant to do it, of course. But it was murder, all the same. Men like Larry—weak, impulsive, sentimental, introspective creatures—did they ever mean what they did? This man, this Walenn, was, by all accounts, better dead than alive; no need to waste a thought on him! But, crime—the ugliness—Justice unsatisfied! Crime concealed—and his own share in the concealment! And yet—brother to brother! Surely no one could demand action from him! It was only a question of what he was going to advise Larry to do. To keep silent, and disappear? Had that a chance of success? Perhaps—if the answers to his questions had been correct. But this girl! Suppose the dead man's relationship to her were ferreted out, could she be relied on not to endanger Larry? These women were all the same, unstable as water, emotional, shiftless—pests of society. Then, too, a crime untracked, dogging all his brother's after life; a secret following him wherever he might vanish to; hanging over him, watching for some drunken moment to slip out of his lips. It was bad to think of. A clean breast of it? But his heart twitched within him. "Brother of Mr. Keith Darrant, the well-known King's Counsel"—visiting a woman of the town, strangling with his bare hands the woman's husband! No intention to murder, but—a dead man! A dead man carried out of the house, laid under a dark archway! Provocation! Recommended to mercy—penal servitude for life! Was that the advice he was going to give Larry tomorrow morning?

And he had a sudden vision of shaven men with clay-colored features, run, as it were, to seed, as he had seen them once in Pentonville, when he had gone there to visit a prisoner. Larry! whom, as a baby creature, he had watched straddling; whom, as a little fellow, he had fagged; whom he had seen through scrapes at college; to whom he had lent money time and again, and time and again admonished in his courses. Larry! Five years younger than himself; and committed to his charge by their mother when she died. To become for life one of those men with faces like diseased plants; with no hair but a bushy stubble; with arrows marked on their yellow clothes! Larry! One of those men herded like sheep; at the beck and call of common men! A gentleman, his own brother, to live that slave's life, to be ordered here and there, year after year, day in, day out. Something snapped within him. He could not give that advice. Impossible! But, if not, he must make sure of his ground, must verify, must know. This Glove Lane—this archway? It would not be far from where he was that very moment. He looked for some one of whom to make inquiry. A policeman was standing at the corner, his stolid face illumined by a lamp; capable and watchful—an excellent officer, no doubt; but, turning his head away, Keith passed him without a word. Strange to feel that cold, uneasy feeling in presence of the law! A grim little driving home of what it all meant! Then, suddenly, he saw that the turning to his left was Borrow Street itself. He walked up one side, crossed over, and returned. He passed Number Forty-two, a small house with business names printed on the lifeless windows of the first and second floors; with dark-curtained windows on the ground floor, or was there just a slink of light in one corner? Which way had Larry turned? Which way under that grisly burden? Fifty paces of this squalid street—

narrow, and dark, and empty, thank heaven! Glove Lane! Here it was! A tiny runlet of a street. And here—! He had run right on to the arch, a brick bridge connecting two portions of a warehouse, and dark indeed.

"That's right, gov'nor! There's the place!" He needed all his self-control to turn leisurely to the speaker. " 'Ere's where they found the body—very spot—leanin' up 'ere. They ain't got 'im yet. Lytest—me lord!"

It was a ragged boy holding out a tattered yellowish journal. His lynx eyes peered up from under lanky wisps of hair, and his voice had the proprietary note of one making "a corner" in his news. Keith took the paper and gave him twopence. He even found a sort of comfort in the young ghoul's hanging about there; it meant that others besides himself had come morbidly to look. By the dim lamplight he read: "Glove Lane garrotting mystery. Nothing has yet been discovered of the murdered man's identity; from the cut of his clothes he is supposed to be a foreigner." The boy had vanished, and Keith saw the figure of a policeman coming slowly down this gutter of a street. A second's hesitation, and he stood firm. Nothing obviously could have brought him here save this "mystery," and he stayed quietly staring at the arch. The policeman moved up abreast. Keith saw that he was the one whom he had passed just now. He noted the cold offensive question die out of the man's eyes when they caught the gleam of white shirt-front under the opened fur collar. And holding up the paper, he said:

"Is this where the man was found?"

"Yes, sir."

"Still a mystery, I see?"

"Well, we can't always go by the papers. But I don't fancy they do know much about it, yet."

"Dark spot. Do fellows sleep under here?"

The policeman nodded. "There's not an arch in London where we don't get 'em sometimes."

"Nothing found on him—I think I read?"

"Not a copper. Pockets inside out. There's some funny characters about this quarter. Greeks, Hitalians—all sorts."

Queer sensation this, of being glad of a policeman's confidential tone!

"Well, good-night!"

"Good-night, sir. Good-night!"

He looked back from Borrow Street. The policeman was still standing there holding up his lantern, so that its light fell into the archway, as if trying to read its secret.

Now that he had seen this dark, deserted spot, the chances seemed to him much better. "Pockets inside out!" Either Larry had had presence of mind to do a very clever thing, or some one had been at the body before the police found it. That was the more likely. A dead backwater of a place. At three o'clock—loneliest of all hours—Larry's five minutes' grim excursion to and fro might well have passed unseen! Now, it all depended on the girl; on whether Laurence had been seen coming to her or going away; on whether, if the man's relationship to her were discovered, she could be relied on to say nothing. There was not a soul in Borrow Street now; hardly even a lighted window; and he took one of those rather desperate decisions only possible to men daily accustomed to the instant taking of responsibility. He would go to her, and see for himself. He came to the door of Forty-two, obviously one of those which are only shut at night, and tried the larger key. It fitted, and he was in a gas-lighted passage, with an oil-clothed floor, and a single door to his left. He stood there undecided. She must be made to understand that he knew everything. She must not be told more than that he was a

friend of Larry's. She must not be frightened, yet must be forced to give her very soul away. A hostile witness—not to be treated as hostile—a matter for delicate handling! But his knock was not answered.

Should he give up this nerve-racking, bizarre effort to come at a basis of judgment; go away, and just tell Laurence that he could not advise him? And then—what? Something *must* be done. He knocked again. Still no answer. And with that impatience of being thwarted, natural to him, and fostered to the full by the conditions of his life, he tried the other key. It worked, and he opened the door. Inside all was dark, but a voice from some way off, with a sort of breathless relief in its foreign tones, said:

"Oh! then it's you, Larry! Why did you knock? I was so frightened. Turn up the light, dear. Come in!"

Feeling by the door for a switch in the pitch blackness, he was conscious of arms round his neck, a warm thinly clad body pressed to his own; then withdrawn as quickly, with a gasp, and the most awful terror-stricken whisper:

"Oh! Who is it?"

With a glacial shiver down his own spine, Keith answered:

"A friend of Laurence. Don't be frightened!"

There was such silence that he could hear a clock ticking, and the sound of his own hand passing over the surface of the wall, trying to find the switch. He found it, and in the light which leaped up he saw, stiffened against a dark curtain evidently screening off a bedroom, a girl standing, holding a long black coat together at her throat, so that her face with its pale brown hair, short and square-cut and curling up underneath, had an uncanny look of being detached from any body. Her face was so alabaster pale that the staring, startled eyes, dark blue or brown, and the faint rose of the parted lips, were like color stain-

ings on a white mask; and it had a strange delicacy, truth, and pathos, such as only suffering brings. Though not susceptible to aesthetic emotion, Keith was curiously affected. He said gently:

"You needn't be afraid. I haven't come to do you harm —quite the contrary. May I sit down and talk?" And, holding up the keys, he added: "Laurence wouldn't have given me these, would he, if he hadn't trusted me?"

Still she did not move, and he had the impression that he was looking at a spirit—a spirit startled out of its flesh. Nor at the moment did it seem in the least strange that he should conceive such an odd thought. He stared round the room—clean and tawdry, with its tarnished gilt mirror, marble-topped side-table, and plush-covered sofa. Twenty years and more since he had been in such a place. And he said:

"Won't you sit down? I'm sorry to have startled you."

But still she did not move, whispering:

"Who are you, please?"

And, moved suddenly beyond the realm of caution by the terror in that whisper, he answered:

"Larry's brother."

She uttered a little sigh of relief which went to Keith's heart, and, still holding the dark coat together at her throat, came forward and sat down on the sofa. He could see that her feet, thrust into slippers, were bare; with her short hair, and those candid startled eyes, she looked like a tall child. He drew up a chair and said:

"You must forgive me coming at such an hour; he's told me, you see."

He expected her to flinch and gasp; but she only clasped her hands together on her knees, and said:

"Yes?"

Then horror and discomfort rose up in him afresh.

"An awful business!"

Her whisper echoed him:

"Yes, oh! yes! Awful—it is awful!"

And suddenly realizing that the man must have fallen dead just where he was sitting, Keith became stock silent, staring at the floor.

"Yes," she whispered; "just there. I see him now always falling!"

How she said that! With what a strange gentle despair! In this girl of evil life, who had brought on them this tragedy, what was it which moved him to a sort of unwilling compassion?

"You look very young," he said.

"I am twenty."

"And you are fond of—my brother?"

"I would die for him."

Impossible to mistake the tone of her voice, or the look in her eyes, true deep Slav eyes; dark brown, not blue as he had thought at first. It was a very pretty face—either her life had not eaten into it yet, or the suffering of these last hours had purged away those marks; or perhaps this devotion of hers to Larry. He felt strangely at sea, sitting there with this child of twenty; he, over forty, a man of the world, professionally used to every side of human nature. But he said, stammering a little:

"I—I have come to see how far you can save him. Listen, and just answer the questions I put to you."

She raised her hands, squeezed them together, and murmured:

"Oh! I will answer anything."

"This man, then—your—your husband—was he a bad man?"

"A dreadful man."

"Before he came here last night, how long since you saw him?"

"Eighteen months."

"Where did you live when you saw him last?"

"In Pimlico."

"Does anybody about here know you as Mrs. Walenn?"

"No. When I came here, after my little girl died, I came to live a bad life. Nobody knows me at all. I am quite alone."

"If they discover who he was, they will look for his wife?"

"I do not know. He did not let people think I was married to him. I was very young; he treated many, I think, like me."

"Do you think he was known to the police?"

She shook her head. "He was very clever."

"What is your name now?"

"Wanda Livinska."

"Were you known by that name before you were married?"

"Wanda is my Christian name. Livinska—I just call myself."

"I see; since you came here."

"Yes."

"Did my brother ever see this man before last night?"

"Never."

"You had told him about his treatment of you?"

"Yes. And that man first went for him."

"I saw the mark. Do you think any one saw my brother come to you?"

"I do not know. He says not."

"Can you tell if any one saw him carrying the—the thing away?"

"No one in this street—I was looking."

"Nor coming back?"

"No one."

"Nor going out in the morning?"

"I do not think it."

"Have you a servant?"

"Only a woman who comes at nine in the morning for an hour."

"Does she know Larry?"

"No."

"Friends, acquaintances?"

"No; I am very quiet. And since I knew your brother, I see no one. Nobody comes here but him for a long time now."

"How long?"

"Five months."

"Have you been out today?"

"No."

"What have you been doing?"

"Crying."

It was said with a certain dreadful simplicity, and pressing her hands together she went on:

"He is in danger because of me. I am so afraid for him."

Holding up his hand to check that emotion, he said:

"Look at me!"

She fixed those dark eyes on him, and in her bare throat, from which the coat had fallen back, he could see her resolutely swallowing down her agitation.

"If the worst comes to the worst, and this man is traced to you, can you trust yourself not to give my brother away?"

Her eyes shone. She got up and went to the fireplace:

"Look! I have burned all the things he has given me—even his picture. Now I have nothing from him."

Keith, too, got up.

"Good! One more question: Do the police know you, because—because of your life?"

She shook her head, looking at him intently with those mournfully true eyes. And he felt a sort of shame.

"I was obliged to ask. Do you know where he lives?"

"Yes."

"You must not go there. And he must not come to you here."

Her lips quivered; but she bowed her head. Suddenly he found her quite close to him, speaking almost in a whisper:

"Please do not take him from me altogether. I will be so careful. I will not do anything to hurt him; but if I cannot see him sometimes I shall die. Please do not take him from me." And catching his hand between her own she pressed it desperately. It was several seconds before Keith said:

"Leave that to me. I will see him. I shall arrange. You must leave that to me."

"But you will be kind?"

He felt her lips kissing his hand. And the soft moist touch sent a queer feeling through him, protective, yet just a little brutal, having in it a shiver of sensuality. He withdrew his hand. And as if warned that she had been too pressing, she recoiled humbly. But suddenly she turned, and stood absolutely rigid; then almost inaudibly whispered: "Listen! Some one out—out there!" And darting past him she turned out the light.

Almost at once came a knock on the door. He could feel —actually feel the terror of this girl beside him in the dark. And he, too, felt terror. Who could it be? No one came but Larry, she had said. Who else then could it be? Again came the knock, louder! He felt the breath of her whisper on his cheek: "If it is Larry! I must open." He

shrank back against the wall, heard her open the door and say faintly: "Yes. Please! Who?"

Light painted a thin moving line on the wall opposite, and a voice which Keith recognized answered:

"All right, miss. Your outer door's open here. You ought to keep it shut after dark."

God! That policeman! And it had been his own doing, not shutting the outer door behind when he came in. He heard her say timidly in her foreign voice: "Thank you, sir!" the policeman's retreating steps, the outer door being shut, and felt her close to him again. That something in her youth and strange prettiness had touched and kept him gentle, no longer blunted the edge of his exasperation, now that he could not see her. They were all the same, these women; could not speak the truth! And he said brusquely:

"You told me they didn't know you!"

Her voice answered like a sigh:

"I did not think they did, sir. It is so long I was not out in the town, not since I had Larry."

The repulsion which all the time seethed deep in Keith welled up at those words. His brother—son of *his* mother, a gentleman—the property of this girl, bound to her, body and soul, by this unspeakable event! But she had turned up the light. Had she some intuition that darkness was against her? Yes, she *was* pretty with that soft face, colorless save for its lips and dark eyes, with that face somehow so touching, so unaccountably good, and like a child's.

"I am going now," he said. "Remember! He mustn't come here; you mustn't go to him. I shall see him tomorrow. If you are as fond of him as you say—take care, take care!"

She sighed out, "Yes! oh, yes!" and Keith went to the

door. She was standing with her back to the wall, and to follow him she only moved her head—that dove-like face with all its life in eyes which seemed saying: "Look into us; nothing we hide; all—all is there!"

And he went out.

In the passage he paused before opening the outer door. He did not want to meet that policeman again; the fellow's round should have taken him well out of the street by now, and, turning the handle cautiously, he looked out. No one in sight. He stood a moment, wondering if he should turn to right or left, then briskly crossed the street. A voice to his right hand said:

"Good-night, sir."

There in the shadow of a doorway the policeman was standing. The fellow must have seen him coming out! Utterly unable to restrain a start, and muttering "Good-night!" Keith walked on rapidly.

He went full quarter of a mile before he lost that startled and uneasy feeling in sardonic exasperation that he, Keith Darrant, had been taken for a frequenter of a lady of the town. The whole thing—the whole thing!—a vile and disgusting business! His very mind felt dirty and breathless; his spirit, drawn out of sheath, had slowly to slide back before he could at all focus and readjust his reasoning faculty. Certainly, he had got the knowledge he wanted. There was less danger than he thought. That girl's eyes! No mistaking her devotion. She would not give Larry away. Yes! Larry must clear out—South America—the East—it did not matter. But he felt no relief. The cheap, tawdry room had wrapped itself round his fancy with its atmosphere of murky love, with the feeling it inspired, of emotion caged within those yellowish walls and the red stuff of its furniture. That girl's face! Devotion; truth, too, and beauty, rare and moving, in its set-

ting of darkness and horror, in that nest of vice and of disorder! . . . The dark archway; the street arab, with his gleeful: "They 'ain't got 'im yet!"; the feel of those bare arms round his neck; that whisper of horror in the darkness; above all, again, her child face looking into his, so truthful! And suddenly he stood quite still in the street. What in God's name was he about? What grotesque juggling amongst shadows, what strange and ghastly eccentricity was all this? The forces of order and routine, all the actualities of his daily life, marched on him at that moment and swept everything before them. It was a dream, a nightmare—not real! It was ridiculous! That he —*he* should thus be bound up with things so black and bizarre!

He had come by now to the Strand, that street down which every day he moved to the Law Courts, to his daily work; his work so dignified and regular, so irreproachable and solid. No! The thing was all a monstrous nightmare! It would go, if he fixed his mind on the familiar objects around, read the names on the shops, looked at the faces passing. Far down the thoroughfare he caught the outline of the old church, and beyond, the loom of the Law Courts themselves. The bell of a fire-engine sounded, and the horses came galloping by, with the shining metal, rattle of hoofs, and hoarse shouting. Here was a sensation, real and harmless, dignified and customary! A woman flaunting round the corner looked up at him and leered out: "Good-night!" Even that was customary, tolerable. Two policemen passed, supporting between them a man the worse for liquor, full of fight and expletives; the sight was soothing, an ordinary thing which brought passing annoyance, interest, disgust. It had begun to rain; he felt it on his face with pleasure—an actual thing, not eccentric, a thing which happened every day!

He began to cross the street. Cabs were going at furious speed now that the last omnibus had ceased to run; it distracted him to take this actual, ordinary risk run so often every day. During that crossing of the Strand, with the rain in his face and the cabs shooting past, he regained for the first time his assurance, shook off this unreal sense of being in the grip of something, and walked resolutely to the corner of his home turning. But passing into that darker stretch, he again stood still. A policeman had also turned into that street on the other side. Not—surely not—! Absurd! They were all alike to look at—those fellows! Absurd! He walked on sharply, and let himself into his house. But on his way upstairs he could not for the life of him help raising a corner of a curtain and looking from the staircase window. The policeman was marching solemnly, about twenty-five yards away, paying apparently no attention to anything whatever.

IV

Keith woke at five o'clock, his usual hour, without remembrance. But the grisly shadow started up when he entered his study, where the lamp burned, and the fire shone, and the coffee was set ready, just as when yesterday afternoon Larry had stood out there against the wall. For a moment he fought against realization; then, drinking off his coffee, sat down sullenly at the bureau to his customary three hours' study of the day's cases.

Not one word of his brief could he take in. It was all jumbled with murky images and apprehensions, and for full half an hour he suffered mental paralysis. Then the sheer necessity of knowing something of the case which he had to open at half-past ten that morning forced him to a concentration which never quite subdued the *malaise*

at the bottom of his heart. Nevertheless, when he rose at half-past eight and went into the bathroom, he had earned his grim satisfaction in this victory of will-power. By half-past nine he must be at Larry's. A boat left London for the Argentine tomorrow. If Larry was to get away at once, money must be arranged for. And then at breakfast he came on this paragraph in the paper:

"SOHO MURDER

"Inquiry late last night established the fact that the police have discovered the identity of the man found strangled yesterday morning under an archway in Glove Lane. An arrest has been made."

By good fortune he had finished eating, for the words made him feel physically sick. At this very minute Larry might be locked up, waiting to be charged—might even have been arrested before his own visit to the girl last night. If Larry were arrested she must be implicated. What, then, would be his own position? Idiot to go and look at that archway, to go and see the girl! Had that policeman really followed him home? Accessory after the fact! Keith Darrant, King's Counsel, man of mark! He forced himself by an effort, which had something of the heroic, to drop this panicky feeling. Panic never did good. He must face it and see. He refused even to hurry, calmly collected the papers wanted for the day, and attended to a letter or two before he set out in a taxi-cab to Fitzroy Street.

Waiting outside there in the gray morning for his ring to be answered, he looked the very picture of a man who knew his mind, a man of resolution. But it needed all his will-power to ask without tremor: "Mr. Darrant in?" to hear without sign of any kind the answer: "He's not up yet, sir."

"Never mind; I'll go in and see him. Mr. Keith Darrant."

On his way to Laurence's bedroom, in the midst of utter relief, he had the self-possession to think: "This arrest is the best thing that could have happened. It'll keep their noses on a wrong scent till Larry's got away. The girl must be sent off too, but not with him." Panic had ended in quite hardening his resolution. He entered the bedroom with a feeling of disgust. The fellow was lying there, his bare arms crossed behind his tousled head, staring at the ceiling, and smoking one of many cigarettes whose ends littered a chair beside him, whose sickly reek tainted the air. That pale face, with its jutting cheekbones and chin, its hollow cheeks and blue eyes far sunk back—what a wreck of goodness!

He looked up at Keith through the haze of smoke and said quietly: "Well, brother, what's the sentence? 'Transportation for life, and then to be fined forty pounds'?"

The flippancy revolted Keith. It was Larry all over! Last night horrified and humble, this morning, "Don't care" and feather-headed. He said sourly:

"Oh! You can joke about it now?"

Laurence turned his face to the wall.

"Must!"

Fatalism! How detestable were natures like that!

"I've been to see her," he said.

"You?"

"Last night. She can be trusted."

Laurence laughed.

"That I told you."

"I had to see for myself. You must clear out at once, Larry. She can come out to you by the next boat; but you can't go together. Have you any money?"

"No."

"I can foot your expenses, and lend you a year's income in advance. But it must be a clean cut; after you get out there your whereabouts must only be known to me."

A long sigh answered him.

"You're very good to me, Keith; you've always been very good. I don't know why."

Keith answered drily:

"Nor I. There's a boat to the Argentine tomorrow. You're in luck; they've made an arrest. It's in the paper."

"What?"

The cigarette end dropped, the thin pyjama'd figure writhed up and stood clutching at the bedrail.

"What?"

The disturbing thought flitted through Keith's brain: "I was a fool. He takes it queerly; what now?"

Laurence passed his hand over his forehead and sat down on the bed.

"I hadn't thought of that," he said. "It does me!"

Keith stared. In his relief that the arrested man was not Laurence, this had not occurred to him. What folly!

"Why?" he said quickly. "An innocent man's in no danger. They always get the wrong man first. It's a piece of luck, that's all. It gives us time."

How often had he not seen that expression on Larry's face, wistful, questioning, as if trying to see the thing with his—Keith's—eyes, trying to submit to better judgment? And he said, almost gently:

"Now, look here, Larry; this is too serious to trifle with. Don't worry about that. Leave it to me. Just get ready to be off. I'll take your berth and make arrangements. Here's some money for kit. I can come round between five and six and let you know. Pull yourself together, man. As soon as the girl's joined you out there, you'd better get across

to Chile, the further the better. You must simply lose yourself. I must go now, if I'm to get to the Bank before I go down to the courts." And looking very steadily at his brother, he added:

"Come! You've got to think of me in this matter as well as of yourself. No playing fast and loose with the arrangements. Understand?"

But still Larry gazed up at him with that wistful questioning, and not till he had repeated, "Understand?" did he receive "Yes" for answer.

Driving away, he thought: "Queer fellow! I don't know him, shall never know him!" and at once began to concentrate on the practical arrangements. At his bank he drew out £400; but waiting for the notes to be counted he suffered qualms. A clumsy way of doing things! If there had been more time! The thought "Accessory after the fact!" now infected everything. Notes were traceable. No other way of getting him away at once, though. One must take lesser risks to avoid greater. From the bank he drove to the office of the steamship line. He had told Larry he would book his passage. But that would not do! He must only ask anonymously if there were accommodations. Having discovered that there were vacant berths, he drove on to the Law Courts. If he could have taken a morning off, he would have gone down to the police court and seen them charge this man. But even that was not too safe, with a face so well known as his. What would come of this arrest? Nothing, surely! The police always took somebody up to keep the public quiet. Then, suddenly, he had again the feeling that it was all a nightmare; Larry had never done it; the police had got the right man! But instantly the memory of the girl's awe-stricken face, her figure huddling on the sofa, her words: "I see him always falling!" came back. God! What a business!

He felt he had never been more clear-headed and forcible than that morning in court. When he came out for lunch he bought the most sensational of the evening papers. But it was yet too early for news, and he had to go back into court no whit wiser concerning the arrest. When at last he threw off wig and gown, and had got through a conference and other necessary work, he went out to Chancery Lane, buying a paper on the way. Then he hailed a cab and drove once more to Fitzroy Street.

V

Laurence had remained sitting on his bed for many minutes. An innocent man in no danger! Keith had said it—the celebrated lawyer! Could he rely on that? Go out 8,000 miles, he and the girl, and leave a fellow-creature perhaps in mortal peril for an act committed by himself?

In the past night he had touched bottom, as he thought: become ready to face anything. When Keith came in he would without murmur have accepted the advice: "Give yourself up!" He was prepared to pitch away the end of his life as he pitched from him the fag-ends of his cigarettes. And the long sigh he had heaved, hearing of reprieve, had been only half relief. Then, with incredible swiftness there had rushed through him a feeling of unutterable joy and hope. Clean away—into a new country, a new life! The girl and he! Out there he wouldn't care, would rejoice even to have squashed the life out of such a noisome beetle of a man. Out there! Under a new sun, where blood ran thicker than in this foggy land, and people took justice into their own hands. For it had been justice on that brute even though he had not meant to kill him. And then to hear of this arrest! They would be charging the man today. He could go and see the poor creature accused of the murder he himself had committed!

And he laughed. Go and see how likely it was that they might hang a fellow-man in place of himself? He dressed, but too shaky to shave himself, went out to a barber's shop. While there he read the news which Keith had seen. In this paper the name of the arrested man was given: "John Evan, no address." To be brought up on the charge at Bow Street. Yes! He must go. Once, twice, three times he walked past the entrance of the court before at last he entered and screwed himself away among the tag and bobtail.

The court was crowded; and from the murmurs round he could tell that it was his particular case which had brought so many there. In a dazed way he watched charge after charge disposed of with lightning quickness. But were they never going to reach his business? And then suddenly he saw the little scarecrow man of last night advancing to the dock between two policemen, more ragged and miserable than ever by light of day, like some shaggy, wan, gray animal surrounded by sleek hounds.

A sort of satisfied purr was rising all round; and with horror Laurence perceived that this—this was the man accused of what he himself had done—this queer, battered unfortunate to whom he had shown a passing friendliness. Then all feeling merged in the appalling interest of listening. The evidence was very short. Testimony of the hotel-keeper where Walenn had been staying, the identification of his body, and of a snake-shaped ring he had been wearing at dinner that evening. Testimony of a pawnbroker, that this same ring was pawned with him the first thing yesterday morning by the prisoner. Testimony of a policeman that he had noticed the man Evan several times in Glove Lane, and twice moved him on from sleeping under that arch. Testimony of another policeman that, when arrested at midnight, Evan had said: "Yes; I took the

ring off his finger. I found him there dead. . . . I know I oughtn't to have done it. . . . I'm an educated man; it was stupid to pawn the ring. I found him with his pockets turned inside out."

Fascinating and terrible to sit staring at the man in whose place he should have been; to wonder when those small bright-gray bloodshot eyes would spy him out, and how he would meet that glance. Like a baited raccoon the little man stood, screwed back into a corner, mournful, cynical, fierce, with his ridged, obtuse yellow face, and his stubbly gray beard and hair, and his eyes wandering now and again amongst the crowd. But with all his might, Laurence kept his face unmoved. Then came the word, "Remanded"; and, more like a baited beast than ever, the man was led away.

Laurence sat on, a cold perspiration thick on his forehead. Some one else, then, had come on the body and turned the pockets inside out before John Evan took the ring. A man such as Walenn would not be out at night without money. Besides, if Evan had found money on the body he would never have run the risk of taking that ring. Yes, some one else had come on the body first. It was for that one to come forward and prove that the ring was still on the dead man's finger when he left him, and thus clear Evan. He clung to that thought; it seemed to make him less responsible for the little man's position; to remove him and his own deed one step further back. If they found the person who had taken the money, it would prove Evan's innocence. He came out of the court in a sort of trance. And a craving to get drunk attacked him. One could not go on like this without the relief of some oblivion. If he could only get drunk, keep drunk till this business was decided and he knew whether he must give

himself up or no. He had now no fear at all of people suspecting him; only fear of himself—fear that he might go and give himself up. Now he could see the girl; the danger from that was as nothing compared with the danger from his own conscience. He had promised Keith not to see her. Keith had been decent and loyal to him—good old Keith! But he would never understand that this girl was now all he cared about in life; that he would rather be cut off from life itself than be cut off from her. Instead of becoming less and less, she was becoming more and more to him—experience strange and thrilling! Out of deep misery she had grown happy—through him; out of a sordid, shifting life recovered coherence and bloom, through devotion to him—*him*, of all people in the world! It was a miracle. She demanded nothing of him, adored him, as no other woman ever had—it was this which had anchored his drifting barque; this—and her truthful mild intelligence, and that burning warmth of a woman who, long treated by men as but a sack of sex, now loves at last.

And suddenly, mastering his craving to get drunk, he made towards Soho. He had been a fool to give those keys to Keith. She must have been frightened by his visit; and, perhaps, doubly miserable since, knowing nothing, imagining everything! Keith was sure to have terrified her. Poor little thing!

Down the street where he had stolen in the dark with the dead body on his back, he almost ran for the cover of her house. The door was opened to him before he knocked, her arms were round his neck, her lips pressed to his. The fire was out, as if she had been unable to remember to keep warm. A stool had been drawn to the window, and there she had evidently been sitting, like a bird in a cage, looking out into the gray street. Though she had been told

that he was not to come, instinct had kept her there; or the pathetic, aching hope against hope which lovers never part with.

Now that he was there, her first thoughts were for his comfort. The fire was lighted. He must eat, drink, smoke. There was never in her doings any of the "I am doing this for you, but you ought to be doing that for me" which belongs to so many marriages and *liaisons*. She was like a devoted slave, so in love with the chains that she never knew she wore them. And to Laurence, who had so little sense of property, this only served to deepen tenderness, and the hold she had on him. He had resolved not to tell her of the new danger he ran from his own conscience. But resolutions with him were but the opposite of what was sure to come; and at last the words, "They've arrested some one," escaped him.

From her face he knew she had grasped the danger at once; had divined it, perhaps, before he spoke. But she only twined her arms round him and kissed his lips. And he knew that she was begging him to put his love for her above his conscience. Who would ever have thought that he could feel as he did to this girl who had been in the arms of so many! The stained and suffering past of a loved woman awakens in some men only chivalry; in others, more respectable, it rouses a tigerish itch, a rancorous jealousy of what in the past was given to others. Sometimes it will do both. When he had her in his arms he felt no remorse for killing the coarse, handsome brute who had ruined her. He savagely rejoiced in it. But when she laid her head in the hollow of his shoulder, turning to him her white face with the faint color-staining on the parted lips, the cheek, the eyelids; when her dark, wide-apart, brown eyes gazed up in the happiness of her abandonment—he felt only tenderness and protection.

He left her at five o'clock, and had not gone two streets' length before the memory of the little gray vagabond, screwed back in the far corner of the dock like a baited raccoon, of his dreary, creaking voice, took possession of him again; and a kind of savagery mounted in his brain against a world where one could be so tortured without having meant harm to any one.

At the door of his lodgings Keith was getting out of a cab. They went in together, but neither of them sat down; Keith standing with his back to the carefully shut door, Laurence with his back to the table, as if they knew there was a tug coming. And Keith said:

"There's room on that boat. Go down and book your berth before they shut. Here's the money!"

"I'm going to stick it, Keith."

Keith stepped forward and put a roll of notes on the table.

"Now look here, Larry. I've read the police-court proceedings. There's nothing in that. Out of prison, or in prison for a few weeks, it's all the same to a night-bird of that sort. Dismiss it from your mind—there's not nearly enough evidence to convict. This gives you your chance. Take it like a man, and make a new life for yourself."

Laurence smiled; but the smile had a touch of madness and a touch of malice. He took up the notes.

"Clear out, and save the honour of brother Keith. Put them back in your pocket, Keith, or I'll put them in the fire. Come, take them!" And, crossing to the fire, he held them to the bars. "Take them, or in they go!"

Keith took back the notes.

"I've still got some kind of honor, Keith; if I clear out I shall have none, not the rag of any, left. It may be

worth more to me than that—I can't tell yet—I can't tell."

There was a long silence before Keith answered:

"I tell you you're mistaken; no jury will convict. If they did, a judge would never hang on it. A ghoul who can rob a dead body *ought* to be in prison. What he did is worse than what you did, if you come to that!"

Laurence lifted his face.

"Judge not, brother," he said; "the heart is a dark well."

Keith's yellowish face grew red and swollen, as though he were mastering the tickle of a bronchial cough.

"What are you going to do, then? I suppose I may ask you not to be entirely oblivious of our name; or is such a consideration unworthy of your honor?"

Laurence bent his head. The gesture said more clearly than words: "Don't kick a man when he's down!"

"I don't know what I'm going to do—nothing at present. I'm awfully sorry, Keith; awfully sorry."

Keith looked at him, and without another word went out.

VI

To any, save philosophers, reputation may be threatened almost as much by disgrace to name and family as by the disgrace of self. Keith's instinct was always to deal actively with danger. But this blow, whether it fell on him by discovery or by confession, could not be countered. As blight falls on a rose from who knows where, the scandalous murk would light on him. No repulse possible! Not even a wriggling from under! Brother of a murderer hung or sent to penal servitude! His daughter niece to a murderer! His dead mother—a murderer's mother! And to wait day after day, week after week, not knowing whether the blow would fall, was an extraordinary atrocious pen-

ance, the injustice of which, to a man of rectitude, seemed daily the more monstrous.

The remand had produced evidence that the murdered man had been drinking heavily on the night of his death, and further evidence of the accused's professional vagabondage and destitution; it was shown, too, that for some time the archway in Glove Lane had been his favorite night haunt. He had been committed for trial in January. This time, despite misgivings, Keith had attended the police court. To his great relief Larry was not there. But the policeman who had come up while he was looking at the archway, and given him afterwards that scare in the girl's rooms, was chief witness to the way the accused man haunted Glove Lane. Though Keith held his silk hat high, he still had the uncomfortable feeling that the man had recognized him.

His conscience suffered few, if any, twinges for letting this man rest under the shadow of the murder. He genuinely believed that there was not evidence enough to convict; nor was it in him to appreciate the tortures of a vagabond shut up. The scamp deserved what he had got for robbing a dead body; and in any case such a scarecrow was better off in prison than sleeping out under archways in December. Sentiment was foreign to Keith's character, and his justice that of those who subordinate the fates of the weak and shiftless to the needful paramountcy of the strong and well established.

His daughter came back from school for the Christmas holidays. It was hard to look up from her bright eyes and rosy cheeks and see this shadow hanging above his calm and ordered life, as in a glowing room one's eye may catch an impending patch of darkness drawn like a spider's web across a corner of the ceiling.

On the afternoon of Christmas Eve they went, by her

desire, to a church in Soho, where the Christmas Oratorio was being given; and coming away passed, by chance of a wrong turning, down Borrow Street. Ugh! How that startled moment, when the girl had pressed herself against him in the dark, and her terror-stricken whisper: "Oh! Who is it?" leaped out before him! Always that business—that ghastly business! After the trial he would have another try to get them both away. And he thrust his arm within his young daughter's, hurrying her on, out of this street where shadows filled all the winter air.

But that evening when she had gone to bed he felt uncontrollably restless. He had not seen Larry for weeks. What was he about? What desperations were hatching in his disorderly brain? Was he very miserable; had he perhaps sunk into a stupor of debauchery? And the old feeling of protectiveness rose up in him; a warmth born of long-ago Christmas Eves, when they had stockings hung out in the night stuffed by a Santa Claus whose hand never failed to tuck them up, whose kiss was their nightly waft into sleep.

Stars were sparkling out there over the river; the sky frosty-clear, and black. Bells had not begun to ring as yet. And obeying an obscure, deep impulse, Keith wrapped himself once more into his fur coat, pulled a motoring cap over his eyes, and sallied forth.

In the Strand he took a cab to Fitzroy Street. There was no light in Larry's windows, and on a card he saw the words "To Let." Gone! Had he after all cleared out for good? But how—without money? And the girl? Bells were ringing now in the silent frostiness. Christmas Eve! And Keith thought: "If only this wretched business were off my mind! Monstrous that one should suffer for the faults of others!"

He took a route which led him past Borrow Street.

Solitude brooded there, and he walked resolutely down on the far side, looking hard at the girl's window. There was a light. The curtains just failed to meet, so that a thin gleam shone through. He crossed; and after glancing swiftly up and down, deliberately peered in.

He only stood there perhaps twenty seconds, but visual records gleaned in a moment sometimes outlast the visions of hours and days. The electric light was not burning; but, in the center of the room the girl was kneeling in her night-gown before a little table on which were four lighted candles. Her arms were crossed on her breast; the candle-light shone on her fair cropped hair, on the profile of cheek and chin, on her bowed white neck. For a moment he thought her alone; then behind her saw his brother in a sleeping suit, leaning against the wall, with arms crossed, watching. It was the expression on his face which burned the whole thing in, so that always afterwards he was able to see that little scene—such an expression as could never have been on the face of one even faintly conscious that he was watched by any living thing on earth. The whole of Larry's heart and feeling seemed to have come up out of him. Yearning, mockery, love, despair! The depth of his feeling for this girl, his stress of mind, fears, hopes; the flotsam good and evil of his soul, all transfigured there, exposed and unforgettable. The candle-light shone upward on to his face, twisted by the strangest smile; his eyes, darker and more wistful than mortal eyes should be, seemed to beseech and mock the white-clad girl, who, all unconscious, knelt without movement, like a carved figure of devotion. The words seemed coming from his lips: "Pray for us! Bravo! Yes! Pray for us!" And suddenly Keith saw her stretch out her arms and lift her face with a look of ecstasy, and Laurence starting forward. What had she seen beyond the candle flames? It is the unexpected

which invests visions with poignancy. Nothing more strange could Keith have seen in this nest of the murky and illicit. But in sheer panic lest he might be caught thus spying he drew back and hurried on.

So Larry was living there with her! When the moment came he could still find him.

Before going in, he stood full five minutes leaning on the terrace parapet before his house, gazing at the star-frosted sky, and the river cut by the trees into black pools, oiled over by gleams from the Embankment lamps. And, deep down, behind his mere thoughts, he ached—somehow, somewhere ached. Beyond the cage of all that he saw and heard and thought, he had perceived something he could not reach. But the night was cold, the bells silent, for it had struck twelve. Entering his house, he stole upstairs.

VII

If for Keith those six weeks before the Glove Lane murder trial came on were fraught with uneasiness and gloom, they were for Laurence almost the happiest since his youth. From the moment when he left his rooms and went to the girl's to live, a kind of peace and exaltation took possession of him. Not by any effort of will did he throw off the nightmare hanging over him. Nor was he drugged by love. He was in a sort of spiritual catalepsy. In face of fate too powerful for his will, his turmoil, anxiety, and even restlessness had ceased; his life floated in the ether of "what must come, will." Out of this catalepsy, his spirit sometimes fell headlong into black waters. In one such whirlpool he was struggling on the night of Christmas Eve. When the girl rose from her knees he asked her:

"What did you see?"

Pressing close to him, she drew him down on to the floor

before the fire; and they sat, knees drawn up, hands clasped, like two children trying to see over the edge of the world.

"It was the Virgin I saw. She stood against the wall and smiled. We shall be happy soon."

"When we die, Wanda," he said, suddenly, "let it be together. We shall keep each other warm out there."

Huddling to him she whispered: "Yes, oh, yes! If you die, I could not go on living."

It was this utter dependence on him, the feeling that he had rescued something, which gave him sense of anchorage. That, and his buried life in the retreat of these two rooms. Just for an hour in the morning, from nine to ten, the charwoman would come, but not another soul all day. They never went out together. He would stay in bed late, while Wanda bought what they needed for the day's meals; lying on his back, hands clasped behind his head, recalling her face, the movements of her slim, rounded, supple figure, robing itself before his gaze; feeling again the kiss she had left on his lips, the gleam of her soft eyes, so strangely dark in so fair a face. In a sort of trance he would lie still till she came back. Then get up to breakfast about noon of things she had cooked, drinking coffee. In the afternoon he would go out alone and walk for hours, anywhere, so long as it was east. To the east there was always suffering to be seen, always that which soothed him with the feeling that he and his troubles were only a tiny part of trouble; that while so many other sorrowing and shadowy creatures lived he was not cut off. To go west was to encourage dejection. In the west all was like Keith, successful, immaculate, ordered, resolute. He would come back tired out, and sit watching her cook their little dinner. The evenings were given up to love. Queer trance of an existence, which both were afraid to break. No sign

from her of wanting those excitements which girls who have lived her life, even for a few months, are supposed to need. She never asked him to take her anywhere; never, in word, deed, look, seemed anything but almost rapturously content. And yet he knew, and she knew, that they were only waiting to see whether Fate would turn her thumb down on them. In these days he did not drink. Out of his quarter's money, when it came in, he had paid his debts—their expenses were very small. He never went to see Keith, never wrote to him, hardly thought of him. And from those dread apparitions—Walenn lying with the breath choked out of him, and the little gray, driven animal in the dock—he hid, as only a man can who must hide or be destroyed. But daily he bought a newspaper, and feverishly, furtively scanned its columns.

VIII

Coming out of the Law Courts on the afternoon of January 28, at the triumphant end of a desperately fought will case, Keith saw on a poster the words: "Glove Lane Murder: Trial and Verdict"; and with a rush of dismay he thought: "Good God! I never looked at the paper this morning!" The elation which had filled him a second before, the absorption he had felt for two days now in the case so hardly won, seemed suddenly quite sickeningly trivial. What on earth had he been doing to forget that horrible business even for an instant? He stood quite still on the crowded pavement, unable, really unable, to buy a paper. But his face was like a piece of iron when he did step forward and hold his penny out. There it was in the "Stop Press"! "Glove Lane Murder. The jury returned a verdict of Guilty. Sentence of death was passed."

His first sensation was simple irritation. How had they come to commit such an imbecility? Monstrous! The evi-

dence—! Then the futility of even reading the report, of even considering how they had come to record such a verdict struck him with savage suddenness. There it was, and nothing he could do or say would alter it; no condemnation of this idiotic verdict would help reverse it. The situation was desperate, indeed! That five minutes' walk from the Law Courts to his chambers was the longest he had ever taken.

Men of decided character little know beforehand what they will do in certain contingencies. For the imaginations of decided people do not endow mere contingencies with sufficient actuality. Keith had never really settled what he was going to do if this man were condemned. Often in those past weeks he had said to himself: "Of course, if they bring him in guilty, that's another thing!" But, now that they had, he was beset by exactly the same old arguments and feelings, the same instincts of loyalty and protection towards Laurence and himself, intensified by the fearful imminence of the danger. And yet, here was this man about to be hung for a thing he had not done! Nothing could get over that! But then he was such a worthless vagabond, a ghoul who had robbed a dead body. If Larry were condemned in his stead, would there be any less miscarriage of justice? To strangle a brute who had struck you, by the accident of keeping your hands on his throat a few seconds too long, was there any more guilt in that —was there even as much as in deliberate theft from a dead man? Reverence for order, for justice, and established fact, will often march shoulder to shoulder with Jesuitry in natures to whom success is vital.

In the narrow stone passage leading to his staircase a friend called out: "Bravo, Darrant! That was a squeak! Congratulations!" And with a bitter little smile Keith thought: "Congratulations! I!"

At the first possible moment he hurried back to the Strand, and, hailing a cab, he told the man to put him down at a turning near to Borrow Street.

It was the girl who opened to his knock. Startled, clasping her hands, she looked strange to Keith in her black skirt and blouse of some soft velvety stuff the color of faded roses. Her round, rather long throat was bare; and Keith noticed fretfully that she wore gold earrings. Her eyes, so pitch dark against her white face, and the short fair hair which curled into her neck, seemed both to search and to plead.

"My brother?"

"He is not in, sir, yet."

"Do you know where he is?"

"No."

"He is living with you here now?"

"Yes."

"Are you still as fond of him as ever, then?"

With a movement, as though she despaired of words, she clasped her hands over her heart. And he said:

"I see."

He had the same strange feeling as on his first visit to her, and when through the chink in the curtains he had watched her kneeling—of pity mingled with some faint sexual emotion. And crossing to the fire he asked:

"May I wait for him?"

"Oh! Please! Will you sit down?"

But Keith shook his head. And with a catch in her breath she said:

"You will not take him from me. I should die."

He turned round on her sharply.

"*I* don't want him taken from you. I want to help you keep him. Are you ready to go away at any time?"

"Yes. Oh, yes!"

"And he?"

She answered almost in a whisper:

"Yes; but there is that poor man."

"That poor man is a graveyard thief; a hyena; a ghoul —not worth consideration." And the rasp in his own voice surprised him.

"Ah!" she sighed. "But I am sorry for him. Perhaps he was hungry. I have been hungry—you do things then that you would not. And perhaps he has no one to love; if you have no one to love you can be very bad. I think of him often—in prison."

Between his teeth Keith muttered: "And Laurence?"

"We do never speak of it; we are afraid."

"He's not told you, then, about the trial?"

Her eyes dilated.

"The trial! Oh! He was strange last night. This morning, too, he got up early. Is it—is it over?"

"Yes."

"What has come?"

"Guilty."

For a moment Keith thought she was going to faint. She had closed her eyes, and swayed so that he took a step and put his hands on her arms.

"Listen!" he said. "Help me, don't let Laurence out of your sight. We must have time. I must see what they intend to do. They can't be going to hang this man. I must have time, I tell you. You must prevent his giving himself up."

She stood, staring in his face, while he still held her arms, gripping into her soft flesh through the velvety sleeves.

"Do you understand?"

"Yes—but if he has already!"

Keith felt the shiver which ran through her. And the

thought rushed into his mind: "My God! Suppose the police come round while I'm here!" If Larry had indeed gone to them! If that policeman who had seen him here the night after the murder should find him here again just after the verdict! He said almost fiercely:

"Can I trust you not to let Larry out of your sight? Quick! Answer!"

Clasping her hands to her breast, she answered humbly:

"I will try."

"If he hasn't already done this, watch him like a lynx! Don't let him go out without you. I'll come tomorrow morning early. You're a Catholic, aren't you? Swear to me that you won't let him do anything till he's seen me again."

She did not answer, looking past him at the door; and Keith heard a key in the latch. There was Laurence himself, holding in his hand a great bunch of pink lilies and white narcissi. His face was pale and haggard. He said quietly:

"Hallo, Keith!"

The girl's eyes were fastened on Larry's face; and Keith, looking from one to the other, knew that he had never had more need for wariness.

"Have you seen?" he said.

Laurence nodded. His expression, as a rule so tell-tale of his emotions, baffled Keith utterly.

"Well?"

"I've been expecting it."

"The thing can't stand—that's certain. But I must have time to look into the report. I must have time to see what I can do. D'you understand me, Larry?—I must have time." He knew he was talking at random. The only thing was to get them away at once out of reach of confession; but he dared not say so.

"Promise me that you'll do nothing, that you won't go out even till I've seen you tomorrow morning."

Again Laurence nodded. And Keith looked at the girl. Would she see that he did not break that promise? Her eyes were still fixed immovably on Larry's face. And with the feeling that he could get no further, Keith turned to go.

"Promise me," he said.

Laurence answered: "I promise."

He was smiling. Keith could make nothing of that smile, nor of the expression in the girl's eyes. And saying: "I have your promise, I rely on it!" he went.

IX

To keep from any woman who loves, knowledge of her lover's mood, is as hard as to keep music from moving the heart. But when that woman has lived in suffering, and for the first time knows the comfort of love, then let the lover try as he may to disguise his heart—no use! Yet by virtue of subtler abnegation she will often succeed in keeping it from him that she knows.

When Keith was gone the girl made no outcry, asked no questions, managed that Larry should not suspect her intuition; all that evening she acted as if she knew of nothing preparing within him, and through him, within herself.

His words, caresses, the very zest with which he helped her to prepare the feast, the flowers he had brought, the wine he made her drink, the avoidance of any word which could spoil their happiness, all—all told her. He was too inexorably gay and loving. Not for her—to whom every word and every kiss had uncannily the desperate value of a last word and kiss—not for her to deprive herself of these by any sign or gesture which might betray her

prescience. She took all, and would have taken more, a hundredfold. She did not want to drink the wine he kept tilting into her glass, but, with the acceptance learned by women who have lived her life, she did not refuse. She had never refused him anything.

Laurence drank deeply. The wine gave an edge to these few hours of pleasure, an exaltation of energy. It dulled his sense of pity, too. It was pity he was afraid of—for himself and for this girl. To make even this tawdry room look beautiful, with firelight and candlelight, dark amber wine in the glasses, tall pink lilies spilling their saffron, exuding their hot perfume—she and even himself must look their best. Not even music was lacking to their feast. Some one was playing a pianola across the street, and the sound, very faint, came stealing—swelling, sinking, festive, mournful; having a far-off life of its own, like the flickering fire-flames before which they lay embraced, or the lilies delicate between the candles. Listening to that music, tracing with his finger the tiny veins on her breast, he lay like one recovering from a swoon. No parting. None! But sleep, as the firelight sleeps when flames die; as music sleeps on its deserted strings!

And the girl watched him.

It was nearly ten when he bade her go to bed. And after she had gone obedient into the bedroom, he brought ink and paper down by the fire. The drifter, the unstable, the good-for-nothing—did not falter. He had thought, when it came to the point, he would fail himself; but a sort of rage bore him forward. If he lived on and confessed, they would shut him up, take from him the one thing he loved, cut him off from her; sand up his only well in the desert. Curse them! And he wrote by firelight which mellowed the white sheets of paper; while, against the

dark curtain, the girl, in her nightgown, unconscious of the cold, stood watching.

A man, when he drowns, remembers his past. Like the lost poet he had "gone with the wind." Now it was for him to be true in his fashion. A man may falter for weeks and weeks, consciously, subconsciously, even in his dreams, till there comes that moment when the only thing impossible is to go on faltering. The black cap, the little driven gray man looking up at it with a sort of wonder—faltering had ceased!

He had finished now, and was but staring into the fire.

The fire, the candles, and the fire—no more the flame and flicker!

And, by the dark curtain, the girl watched.

X

Keith went, not home, but to his club; and in the room devoted to the reception of guests, empty at this hour, he sat down and read the report of the trial. The fools had made out a case that looked black enough. And for a long time, on the thick soft carpet which let out no sound of footfall, he paced up and down, thinking. He might see the defending counsel, might surely do that as an expert who thought there had been miscarriage of justice. They must appeal; a petition, too, might be started in the last event. The thing could—must be put right yet, if only Larry and that girl did nothing!

He had no appetite, but the custom of dining is too strong. And while he ate, he glanced with irritation at his fellow-members. They looked so at their ease. Unjust—that this black cloud should hang over one blameless as any of them! Friends, connoisseurs of such things—a judge among them—came specially to his table to express

their admiration of his conduct of that will case. Tonight he had real excuse for pride, but he felt none. Yet, in this well-warmed quietly glowing room, filled with decorously eating, decorously talking men, he gained insensibly some comfort. This surely was reality; that shadowy business out there only the drear sound of a wind one must and did keep out—like the poverty and grime which had no real existence for the secure and prosperous. He drank champagne. It helped to fortify reality, to make shadows seem more shadowy. And down in the smoking-room he sat before the fire, in one of those chairs which embalm after-dinner dreams. He grew sleepy there, and at eleven o'clock rose to go home. But when he had once passed down the shallow marble steps, out through the revolving door which let in no draughts, he was visited by fear, as if he had drawn it in with the breath of the January wind. Larry's face; and the girl watching it! Why had she watched like that? Larry's smile; the flowers in his hand? Buying flowers at such a moment! The girl was his slave —whatever he told her, she would do. But she would never be able to stop him. At this very moment he might be rushing to give himself up!

His hand, thrust deep into the pocket of his fur coat, came in contact suddenly with something cold. The keys Larry had given him all that time ago. There they had lain forgotten ever since. The chance touch decided him. He turned off towards Borrow Street, walking at full speed. He could but go again and see. He would sleep better if he knew that he had left no stone unturned. At the corner of that dismal street he had to wait for solitude before he made for the house which he now loathed with a deadly loathing. He opened the outer door and shut it to behind him. He knocked, but no one came. Perhaps they had gone to bed. Again and again he knocked,

then opened the door, stepped in, and closed it carefully. Candles lighted, the fire burning; cushions thrown on the floor in front of it and strewn with flowers! The table, too, covered with flowers and with the remnants of a meal. Through the half-drawn curtain he could see that the inner room was also lighted. Had they gone out, leaving everything like this? Gone out! His heart beat. Bottles! Larry had been drinking!

Had it really come? Must he go back home with this murk on him; knowing that his brother was a confessed and branded murderer? He went quickly to the half-drawn curtains and looked in. Against the wall he saw a bed, and those two in it. He recoiled in sheer amazement and relief. Asleep with curtains undrawn, lights left on? Asleep through all his knocking! They must both be drunk. The blood rushed up in his neck. Asleep! And rushing forward again, he called out: "Larry!" Then, with a gasp he went towards the bed. "Larry!" No answer! No movement! Seizing his brother's shoulder, he shook it violently. It felt cold. They were lying in each other's arms, breast to breast, lips to lips, their faces white in the light shining above the dressing-table. And such a shudder shook Keith that he had to grasp the brass rail above their heads. Then he bent down, and, wetting his finger, passed it close to their joined lips. No two could ever swoon so utterly as that; not even a drunken sleep could be so fast. His wet finger felt not the faintest stir of air, nor was there any movement in the pulses of their hands. No breath! No life! The eyes of the girl were closed. How strangely innocent she looked! Larry's open eyes seemed to be gazing at her shut eyes; but Keith saw that they were sightless. With a sort of sob he drew down the lids. Then, by an impulse that he could never have explained, he laid a hand on his brother's head, and a hand

on the girl's fair hair. The clothes had fallen down a little from her bare shoulder; he pulled them up, as if to keep her warm, and caught the glint of metal; a tiny gilt crucifix no longer than a thumb-nail, on a thread of steel chain, had slipped down from her breast into the hollow of the arm which lay round Larry's neck. Keith buried it beneath the clothes and noticed an envelope pinned to the coverlet; bending down he read: "Please give this at once to the police.—Laurence Darrant." He thrust it into his pocket. Like elastic stretched beyond its uttermost, his reason, will, faculties of calculation and resolve snapped to within him. He thought with incredible swiftness: "I must know nothing of this. I must go!" And, almost before he knew that he had moved, he was out again in the street.

He could never have told of what he thought while he was walking home. He did not really come to himself till he was in his study. There, with a trembling hand, he poured himself out whisky and drank it off! If he had not chanced to go there, the charwoman would have found them when she came in the morning, and given that envelope to the police! He took it out. He had a right—a right to know what was in it! He broke it open.

> "I, Laurence Darrant, about to die by my own hand, declare that this is a solemn and true confession. I committed what is known as the Glove Lane Murder on the night of November the 27th last in the following way"—on and on to the last words—"We didn't want to die; but we could not bear separation, and I couldn't face letting an innocent man be hung for me. I do not see any other way. I beg that there may be no *post-mortem* on our bodies. The stuff we

have taken is some of that which will be found on the dressing-table. Please bury us together.

"LAURENCE DARRANT.

"*January the 28th*, about ten o'clock P.M."

Full five minutes Keith stood with those sheets of paper in his hand, while the clock ticked, the wind moaned a little in the trees outside, the flames licked the logs with the quiet click and ruffle of their intense far-away life down there on the hearth. Then he roused himself, and sat down to read the whole again.

There it was, just as Larry had told it to him—nothing left out, very clear; even to the addresses of people who could identify the girl as having once been Walenn's wife or mistress. It would convince. Yes! It would convince.

The sheets dropped from his hand. Very slowly he was grasping the appalling fact that on the floor beside his chair lay the life or death of yet another man; that by taking this confession he had taken into his own hands the fate of the vagabond lying under sentence of death; that he could not give him back his life without incurring the smirch of this disgrace, without even endangering himself. If he let this confession reach the authorities he could never escape the gravest suspicion that he had known of the whole affair during these two months. He would have to attend the inquest, be recognized by that policeman as having come to the archway to see where the body had lain, as having visited the girl the very evening after the murder. Who would believe in the mere coincidence of such visits on the part of the murderer's brother? But apart from that suspicion, the fearful scandal which so sensational an affair must make would mar his career, his life, his young daughter's life! Larry's suicide with

this girl would make sensation enough as it was; but nothing to that other. Such a death had its romance; involved him in no way save as a mourner, could perhaps even be hushed up! The other—nothing could hush that up, nothing prevent its ringing to the house-tops. He got up from his chair, and for many minutes roamed the room unable to get his mind to bear on the issue. Images kept starting up before him. The face of the man who handed him wig and gown each morning, puffy and curious, with a leer on it he had never noticed before; his young daughter's lifted eyebrows, mouth drooping, eyes troubled; the tiny gilt crucifix glinting in the hollow of the dead girl's arm; the sightless look in Larry's unclosed eyes; even his own thumb and finger pulling the lids down. And then he saw a street and endless people passing, turning to stare at him. And, stopping in his tramp, he said aloud: "Let them go to hell! Seven days' wonder!" Was he not trustee to that confession! Trustee! After all he had done nothing to be ashamed of, even if he had kept knowledge dark. A brother! Who could blame him? And he picked up those sheets of paper. But, like a great murky hand, the scandal spread itself about him; its coarse malignant voice seemed shouting: "Paiper! . . . Paiper! . . . Glove Lane Murder! . . . Suicide and confession of brother of well-known K.C. . . . Well-known K.C.'s brother. . . . Murder and suicide. . . . Paiper!" Was he to let loose that flood of foulness? Was he, who had done nothing, to smirch his own little daughter's life; to smirch his dead brother, their dead mother—himself, his own valuable, important future? And all for a sewer rat! Let him hang, let the fellow hang if he must! And that was not certain. Appeal! Petition! He might—he should be saved! To have got thus far and then, by his own action, topple himself down!

With a sudden darting movement he thrust the confession in among the burning coals. And a smile licked at the folds in his dark face, like those flames licking the sheets of paper, till they writhed and blackened. With the toe of his boot he dispersed their scorched and crumbling wafer. Stamp them in! Stamp in that man's life! Burnt! No more doubts, no more of this gnawing fear! Burnt? A man—an innocent—sewer rat! Recoiling from the fire he grasped his forehead. Burning hot.

Well, it was done! Only fools without will or purpose regretted. And suddenly he laughed. So Larry had died for nothing! He had no will, no purpose, and was dead! He and that girl might now have been living, loving each other in the warm night, away at the other end of the world, instead of lying dead in the cold night here! Fools and weaklings regretted, suffered from conscience and remorse. A man trod firmly, held to his purpose, no matter what came of it!

He went to the window and drew back the curtain. What was that? A gibbet in the air, a body hanging? Ah! Only the trees—the dark trees—the winter skeleton trees! Recoiling, he returned to his armchair and sat down before the fire. It had been shining like that, the lamp turned low, his chair drawn up, when Larry came in that afternoon two months ago. Bah! He had never come at all! It was a nightmare. He had been asleep. How his head burned! And leaping up, he looked at the calendar on his bureau. "January the 28th!" No dream! His face hardened and darkened. On! Not like Larry! On!

THE KILLERS [1]

by Ernest Hemingway

Ernest Hemingway was born in Illinois in 1898. Beginning as a disciple of Sherwood Anderson, Hemingway published *In Our Time* and *The Torrents of Spring,* both of which reflected the great influence of Anderson's style. However, with the publication of *The Sun Also Rises,* Hemingway departed from imitation and emerged into a style of his own, a style which is the ultimate in simplicity. He has won a wide public for himself. One of his books of short stories is *Men Without Women;* his latest novel, *A Farewell to Arms.* He lives in Paris.

The door of Henry's lunch-room opened and two men came in. They sat down at the counter.

"What's yours?" George asked them.

"I don't know," one of the men said. "What do you want to eat, Al?"

"I don't know," said Al. "I don't know what I want to eat."

Outside it was getting dark. The street-light came on outside the window. The two men at the counter read the menu. From the other end of the counter Nick Adams watched them. He had been talking to George when they came in.

"I'll have a roast pork tenderloin with apple sauce and mashed potatoes," the first man said.

"It isn't ready yet."

"What the hell do you put it on the card for?"

"That's the dinner," George explained. "You can get that at six o'clock."

[1] From *Men Without Women,* by Ernest Hemingway. Copyright, 1928, by Charles Scribner's Sons. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

George looked at the clock on the wall behind the counter.

"It's five o'clock."

"The clock says twenty minutes past five," the second man said.

"It's twenty minutes fast."

"Oh, to hell with the clock," the first man said. "What have you got to eat?"

"I can give you any kind of sandwiches," George said. "You can have ham and eggs, bacon and eggs, liver and bacon, or a steak."

"Give me chicken croquettes with green peas and cream sauce and mashed potatoes."

"That's the dinner."

"Everything we want's the dinner, eh? That's the way you work it."

"I can give you ham and eggs, bacon and eggs, liver—"

"I'll take ham and eggs," the man called Al said. He wore a derby hat and a black overcoat buttoned across the chest. His face was small and white and he had tight lips. He wore a silk muffler and gloves.

"Give me bacon and eggs," said the other man. He was about the same size as Al. Their faces were different, but they were dressed like twins. Both wore overcoats too tight for them. They sat leaning forward, their elbows on the counter.

"Got anything to drink?" Al asked.

"Silver beer, bevo, ginger-ale," George said.

"I mean you got anything to *drink?*"

"Just those I said."

"This is a hot town," said the other. "What do they call it?"

"Summit."

"Ever hear of it?" Al asked his friend.

"No," said the friend.

"What do you do here nights?" Al asked.

"They eat the dinner," his friend said. "They all come here and eat the big dinner."

"That's right," George said.

"So you think that's right?" Al asked George.

"Sure."

"You're a pretty bright boy, aren't you?"

"Sure," said George.

"Well, you're not," said the other little man. "Is he, Al?"

"He's dumb," said Al. He turned to Nick. "What's your name?"

"Adams."

"Another bright boy," Al said. "Ain't he a bright boy, Max?"

"The town's full of bright boys," Max said.

George put the two platters, one of ham and eggs, the other of bacon and eggs, on the counter. He set down two side-dishes of fried potatoes and closed the wicket into the kitchen.

"Which is yours?" he asked Al.

"Don't you remember?"

"Ham and eggs."

"Just a bright boy," Max said. He leaned forward and took the ham and eggs. Both men ate with their gloves on. George watched them eat.

"What are *you* looking at?" Max looked at George.

"Nothing."

"The hell you were. You were looking at me."

"Maybe the boy meant it for a joke, Max," Al said.

George laughed.

"*You* don't have to laugh," Max said to him. "*You* don't have to laugh at all, see?"

"All right," said George.

"So he thinks it's all right." Max turned to Al. "He thinks it's all right. That's a good one."

"Oh, he's a thinker," Al said. They went on eating.

"What's the bright boy's name down the counter?" Al asked Max.

"Hey, bright boy," Max said to Nick. "You go around on the other side of the counter with your boy friend."

"What's the idea?" Nick asked.

"There isn't any idea."

"You better go around, bright boy," Al said. Nick went around behind the counter.

"What's the idea?" George asked.

"None of your damn business," Al said. "Who's out in the kitchen?"

"The nigger."

"What do you mean the nigger?"

"The nigger that cooks."

"Tell him to come in."

"What's the idea?"

"Tell him to come in."

"Where do you think you are?"

"We know damn well where we are," the man called Max said. "Do we look silly?"

"You talk silly," Al said to him. "What the hell do you argue with this kid for? Listen," he said to George, "tell the nigger to come out here."

"What are you going to do to him?"

"Nothing. Use your head, bright boy. What would we do to a nigger?"

George opened the slit that opened back into the kitchen. "Sam," he called. "Come in here a minute."

The door to the kitchen opened and the nigger came

in. "What was it?" he asked. The two men at the counter took a look at him.

"All right, nigger. You stand right there," Al said.

Sam, the nigger, standing in his apron, looked at the two men sitting at the counter. "Yes, sir," he said. Al got down from his stool.

"I'm going back to the kitchen with the nigger and bright boy," he said. "Go on back to the kitchen, nigger. You go with him, bright boy." The little man walked after Nick and Sam, the cook, back into the kitchen. The door shut after them. The man called Max sat at the counter opposite George. He didn't look at George but looked in the mirror that ran along back of the counter. Henry's had been made over from a saloon into a lunch-counter.

"Well, bright boy," Max said, looking into the mirror, "why don't you say something?"

"What's it all about?"

"Hey, Al," Max called, "bright boy wants to know what it's all about."

"Why don't you tell him?" Al's voice came from the kitchen.

"What do you think it's all about?"

"I don't know."

"What do you think?"

Max looked into the mirror all the time he was talking.

"I wouldn't say."

"Hey, Al, bright boy says he wouldn't say what he thinks it's all about."

"I can hear you, all right," Al said from the kitchen. He had propped open the slit that dishes passed through into the kitchen with a catsup bottle. "Listen, bright boy," he said from the kitchen to George. "Stand a little further along the bar. You move a little to the left, Max." He was like a photographer arranging for a group picture.

"Talk to me, bright boy," Max said. "What do you think's going to happen?"

George did not say anything.

"I'll tell you," Max said. "We're going to kill a Swede. Do you know a big Swede named Ole Andreson?"

"Yes."

"He comes here to eat every night, don't he?"

"Sometimes he comes here."

"He comes here at six o'clock, don't he?"

"If he comes."

"We know all that, bright boy," Max said. "Talk about something else. Ever go to the movies?"

"Once in a while."

"You ought to go to the movies more. The movies are fine for a bright boy like you."

"What are you going to kill Ole Andreson for? What did he ever do to you?"

"He never had a chance to do anything to us. He never even seen us."

"And he's only going to see us once," Al said from the kitchen.

"What are you going to kill him for, then?" George asked.

"We're killing him for a friend. Just to oblige a friend, bright boy."

"Shut up," said Al from the kitchen. "You talk too goddam much."

"Well, I got to keep bright boy amused. Don't I, bright boy?"

"You talk too damn much," Al said. "The nigger and my bright boy are amused by themselves. I got them tied up like a couple of girl friends in the convent."

"I suppose you were in a convent."

"You never know."

"You were in a kosher convent. That's where you were."

George looked up at the clock.

"If anybody comes in you tell them the cook is off, and if they keep after it, you tell them you'll go back and cook yourself. Do you get that, bright boy?"

"All right," George said. "What you going to do with us afterward?"

"That'll depend," Max said. "That's one of those things you never know at the time."

George looked up at the clock. It was a quarter past six. The door from the street opened. A street-car motorman came in.

"Hello, George," he said. "Can I get supper?"

"Sam's gone out," George said. "He'll be back in about half an hour."

"I'd better go up the street," the motorman said. George looked at the clock. It was twenty minutes past six.

"That was nice, bright boy," Max said. "You're a regular little gentleman."

"He knew I'd blow his head off," Al said from the kitchen.

"No," said Max. "It ain't that. Bright boy is nice. He's a nice boy. I like him."

At six-fifty-five George said: "He's not coming."

Two other people had been in the lunch-room. Once George had gone out to the kitchen and made a ham-and-egg sandwich "to go" that a man wanted to take with him. Inside the kitchen he saw Al, his derby hat tipped back, sitting on a stool beside the wicket with the muzzle of a sawed-off shotgun resting on the ledge. Nick and the cook were back to back in the corner, a towel tied in each of their mouths. George had cooked the sandwich, wrapped it up in oiled paper, put it in a bag, brought it in, and the man had paid for it and gone out.

"Bright boy can do everything," Max said. "He can cook and everything. You'd make some girl a nice wife, bright boy."

"Yes?" George said. "Your friend, Ole Andreson, isn't going to come."

"We'll give him ten minutes," Max said.

Max watched the mirror and the clock. The hands of the clock marked seven o'clock, and then five minutes past seven.

"Come on, Al," said Max. "We better go. He's not coming."

"Better give him five minutes," Al said from the kitchen.

In the five minutes a man came in, and George explained that the cook was sick.

"Why the hell don't you get another cook?" the man asked. "Aren't you running a lunch-counter?" He went out.

"Come on, Al," Max said.

"What about the two bright boys and the nigger?"

"They're all right."

"You think so?"

"Sure. We're through with it."

"I don't like it," said Al. "It's sloppy. You talk too much."

"Oh, what the hell," said Max. "We got to keep amused, haven't we?"

"You talk too much, all the same," Al said. He came out from the kitchen. The cut-off barrels of the shotgun made a slight bulge under the waist of his too tight-fitting overcoat. He straightened his coat with his gloved hands.

"So long, bright boy," he said to George. "You got a lot of luck."

"That's the truth," Max said. "You ought to play the races, bright boy."

The two of them went out the door. George watched them, through the window, pass under the arc-light and cross the street. In their tight overcoats and derby hats they looked like a vaudeville team. George went back through the swinging-door into the kitchen and untied Nick and the cook.

"I don't want any more of that," said Sam, the cook. "I don't want any more of that."

Nick stood up. He had never had a towel in his mouth before.

"Say," he said. "What the hell?" He was trying to swagger it off.

"They were going to kill Ole Andreson," George said. "They were going to shoot him when he came in to eat."

"Ole Andreson?"

"Sure."

The cook felt the corners of his mouth with his thumbs.

"They all gone?" he asked.

"Yeah," said George. "They're gone now."

"I don't like it," said the cook. "I don't like any of it at all."

"Listen," George said to Nick. "You better go see Ole Andreson."

"All right."

"You better not have anything to do with it at all," Sam, the cook, said. "You better stay way out of it."

"Don't go if you don't want to," George said.

"Mixing up in this ain't going to get you anywhere," the cook said. "You stay out of it."

"I'll go see him," Nick said to George. "Where does he live?"

The cook turned away.

"Little boys always know what they want to do," he said.

"He lives up at Hirsch's rooming-house," George said to Nick.

"I'll go up there."

Outside the arc-light shone through the bare branches of a tree. Nick walked up the street beside the car-tracks and turned at the next arc-light down a side-street. Three houses up the street was Hirsch's rooming-house. Nick walked up the two steps and pushed the bell. A woman came to the door.

"Is Ole Andreson here?"

"Do you want to see him?"

"Yes, if he's in."

Nick followed the woman up a flight of stairs and back to the end of a corridor. She knocked on the door.

"Who is it?"

"It's somebody to see you, Mr. Andreson," the woman said.

"It's Nick Adams."

"Come in."

Nick opened the door and went into the room. Ole Andreson was lying on the bed with all his clothes on. He had been a heavyweight prizefighter and he was too long for the bed. He lay with his head on two pillows. He did not look at Nick.

"What was it?" he asked.

"I was up at Henry's," Nick said, "and two fellows came in and tied up me and the cook, and they said they were going to kill you."

It sounded silly when he said it. Ole Andreson said nothing.

"They put us out in the kitchen," Nick went on. "They were going to shoot you when you came in to supper."

Ole Andreson looked at the wall and did not say anything.

"George thought I better come and tell you about it."

"There isn't anything I can do about it," Ole Andreson said.

"I'll tell you what they were like."

"I don't want to know what they were like," Ole Andreson said. He looked at the wall. "Thanks for coming to tell me about it."

"That's all right."

Nick looked at the big man lying on the bed.

"Don't you want me to go and see the police?"

"No," Ole Andreson said. "That wouldn't do any good."

"Isn't there something I could do?"

"No. There ain't anything to do."

"Maybe it was just a bluff."

"No. It ain't just a bluff."

Ole Andreson rolled over toward the wall.

"The only thing is," he said, talking toward the wall, "I just can't make up my mind to go out. I been in here all day."

"Couldn't you get out of town?"

"No," Ole Andreson said. "I'm through with all that running around."

He looked at the wall.

"There ain't anything to do now."

"Couldn't you fix it up some way?"

"No. I got in wrong." He talked in the same flat voice. "There ain't anything to do. After a while I'll make up my mind to go out."

"I better go back and see George," Nick said.

"So long," said Ole Andreson. He did not look toward Nick. "Thanks for coming around."

Nick went out. As he shut the door he saw Ole Andreson with all his clothes on, lying on the bed looking at the wall.

"He's been in his room all day," the landlady said downstairs. "I guess he don't feel well. I said to him: 'Mr. Andreson, you ought to go out and take a walk on a nice fall day like this,' but he didn't feel like it."

"He doesn't want to go out."

"I'm sorry he don't feel well," the woman said. "He's an awfully nice man. He was in the ring, you know."

"I know it."

"You'd never know it except from the way his face is," the woman said. They stood talking just inside the street door. "He's just as gentle."

"Well, good-night, Mrs. Hirsch," Nick said.

"I'm not Mrs. Hirsch," the woman said. "She owns the place. I just look after it for her. I'm Mrs. Bell."

"Well, good-night, Mrs. Bell," Nick said.

"Good-night," the woman said.

Nick walked up the dark street to the corner under the arc-light, and then along the car-tracks to Henry's eating-house. George was inside, back of the counter.

"Did you see Ole?"

"Yes," said Nick. "He's in his room and he won't go out."

The cook opened the door from the kitchen when he heard Nick's voice.

"I don't even listen to it," he said and shut the door.

"Did you tell him about it?" George asked.

"Sure. I told him but he knows what it's all about."

"What's he going to do?"

"Nothing."

"They'll kill him."

"I guess they will."

"He must have got mixed up in something in Chicago."

"I guess so," said Nick.

"It's a hell of a thing."

"It's an awful thing," Nick said.

They did not say anything. George reached down for a towel and wiped the counter.

"I wonder what he did?" Nick said.

"Double-crossed somebody. That's what they kill them for."

"I'm going to get out of this town," Nick said.

"Yes," said George. "That's a good thing to do."

"I can't stand to think about him waiting in the room and knowing he's going to get it. It's too damned awful."

"Well," said George, "you better not think about it."

EVELINE[1]

by JAMES JOYCE

JAMES JOYCE was born in Dublin in 1882 and was educated at University College, Dublin. He has lived in Rome, Trieste, and Zurich, but is now in Paris. In his work sensational and associational psychology has found compelling and exceptional expression, and he has been called by several critics the most notable of the younger writers. Much of his writing is marked by the "stream of consciousness" method; in fact his novel, *Ulysses,* is a record of all that a man sees, hears, smells, tastes, touches, and thinks during one day of life. Joyce has written *Chamber Music,* poetry; *Dubliners,* short stories; *Exiles,* a play; *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses,* novels.

SHE sat at the window watching the evening invade the avenue. Her head was leaned against the window curtains and in her nostrils was the odor of dusty cretonne. She was tired.

Few people passed. The man out of the last house passed on his way home; she heard his footsteps clacking along the concrete pavement and afterwards crunching on the cinder path before the new red houses. One time there used to be a field there in which they used to play every evening with other people's children. Then a man from Belfast bought the field and built houses in it—not like their little brown houses but bright brick houses with shining roofs. The children of the avenue used to play together in that field—the Devines, the Waters, the Dunns, little Keogh the cripple, she and her brothers and sisters. Ernest, however, never played: he was too grown up. Her

[1] Reprinted from *Dubliners* by James Joyce. New York: The Viking Press. Copyright by B. W. Huebsch, Inc., 1916.

father used often to hunt them in out of the field with his blackthorn stick; but usually little Keogh used to keep *nix* and call out when he saw her father coming. Still they seemed to have been rather happy then. Her father was not so bad then; and besides, her mother was alive. That was a long time ago; she and her brothers and sisters were all grown up; her mother was dead. Tizzie Dunn was dead, too, and the Waters had gone back to England. Everything changes. Now she was going to go away like the others, to leave her home.

Home! She looked round the room, reviewing all its familiar objects which she had dusted once a week for so many years, wondering where on earth all the dust came from. Perhaps she would never see again those familiar objects from which she had never dreamed of being divided. And yet during all those years she had never found out the name of the priest whose yellowing photograph hung on the wall above the broken harmonium beside the colored print of the promises made to Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque. He had been a school friend of her father. Whenever he showed the photograph to a visitor her father used to pass it with a casual word:

"He is in Melbourne now."

She had consented to go away, to leave her home. Was that wise? She tried to weigh each side of the question. In her home anyway she had shelter and food; she had those whom she had known all her life about her. Of course she had to work hard, both in the house and at business. What would they say of her in the Stores when they found out that she had run away with a fellow? Say she was a fool, perhaps; and her place would be filled up by advertisement. Miss Gavan would be glad. She had always had an edge on her, especially whenever there were people listening.

"Miss Hill, don't you see these ladies are waiting?"

"Look lively, Miss Hill, please."

She would not cry many tears at leaving the Stores.

But in her new home, in a distant unknown country, it would not be like that. Then she would be married—she, Eveline. People would treat her with respect then. She would not be treated as her mother had been. Even now, though she was over nineteen, she sometimes felt herself in danger of her father's violence. She knew it was that that had given her the palpitations. When they were growing up he had never gone for her, like he used to go for Harry and Ernest, because she was a girl; but latterly he had begun to threaten her and say what he would do to her only for her dead mother's sake. And now she had nobody to protect her. Ernest was dead and Harry, who was in the church decorating business, was nearly always down somewhere in the country. Besides, the invariable squabble for money on Saturday nights had begun to weary her unspeakably. She always gave her entire wages —seven shillings—and Harry always sent up what he could but the trouble was to get any money from her father. He said she used to squander the money, that she had no head, that he wasn't going to give her his hard-earned money to throw about the streets, and much more, for he was usually fairly bad on Saturday night. In the end he would give her the money and ask her had she any intention of buying Sunday's dinner. Then she had to rush out as quickly as she could and do her marketing, holding her black leather purse tightly in her hand as she elbowed her way through the crowds and returning home late under her load of provisions. She had hard work to keep the house together and to see that the two young children who had been left to her charge went to school regularly and got their meals regularly. It was hard work —a hard life—but now that she was about to leave it she did not find it a wholly undesirable life.

She was about to explore another life with Frank. Frank was very kind, manly, open-hearted. She was to go away with him by the night-boat to be his wife and to live with him in Buenos Ayres where he had a home waiting for her. How well she remembered the first time she had seen him; he was lodging in a house on the main road where she used to visit. It seemed a few weeks ago. He was standing at the gate, his peaked cap pushed back on his head and his hair tumbled forward over a face of bronze. Then they had come to know each other. He used to meet her outside the Stores every evening and see her home. He took her to see *The Bohemian Girl* and she felt elated as she sat in an unaccustomed part of the theater with him. He was awfully fond of music and sang a little. People knew that they were courting and, when he sang about the lass that loves a sailor, she always felt pleasantly confused. He used to call her Poppens out of fun. First of all it had been an excitement for her to have a fellow and then she had begun to like him. He had tales of distant countries. He had started as a deck boy at a pound a month on a ship of the Allan Line going out to Canada. He told her the names of the ships he had been on and the names of the different services. He had sailed through the Straits of Magellan and he told her stories of the terrible Patagonians. He had fallen on his feet in Buenos Ayres, he said, and had come over to the old country just for a holiday. Of course, her father had found out the affair and had forbidden her to have anything to say to him.

"I know these sailor chaps," he said.

One day he had quarreled with Frank and after that she had to meet her lover secretly.

The evening deepened in the avenue. The white of two

letters in her lap grew indistinct. One was to Harry; the other was to her father. Ernest had been her favorite but she liked Harry too. Her father was becoming old lately, she noticed; he would miss her. Sometimes he could be very nice. Not long before, when she had been laid up for a day, he had read her out a ghost story and made toast for her at the fire. Another day, when their mother was alive, they had all gone for a picnic to the Hill of Howth. She remembered her father putting on her mother's bonnet to make the children laugh.

Her time was running out but she continued to sit by the window, leaning her head against the window curtain, inhaling the odor of dusty cretonne. Down far in the avenue she could hear a street organ playing. She knew the air. Strange that it should come that very night to remind her of the promise to her mother, her promise to keep the home together as long as she could. She remembered the last night of her mother's illness; she was again in the close dark room at the other side of the hall and outside she heard a melancholy air of Italy. The organ-player had been ordered to go away and given sixpence. She remembered her father strutting back into the sick-room saying:

"Damned Italians! coming over here!"

As she mused the pitiful vision of her mother's life laid its spell on the very quick of her being—that life of commonplace sacrifices closing in final craziness. She trembled as she heard again her mother's voice saying constantly with foolish insistence:

"Derevaun Seraun! Derevaun Seraun!"

She stood up in a sudden impulse of terror. Escape! She must escape! Frank would save her. He would give her life, perhaps love, too. But she wanted to live. Why should she be unhappy? She had a right to happiness.

Frank would take her in his arms, fold her in his arms. He would save her.

She stood among the swaying crowd in the station at the North Wall. He held her hand and she knew that he was speaking to her, saying something about the passage over and over again. The station was full of soldiers with brown baggage. Through the wide doors of the sheds she caught a glimpse of the black mass of the boat, lying in beside the quay wall, with illumined portholes. She answered nothing. She felt her cheek pale and cold and, out of a maze of distress, she prayed to God to direct her, to show her what was her duty. The boat blew a long mournful whistle into the mist. If she went, tomorrow she would be on the sea with Frank, steaming towards Buenos Ayres. Their passage had been booked. Could she still draw back after all he had done for her? Her distress awoke a nausea in her body and she kept moving her lips in silent fervent prayer.

A bell clanged upon her heart. She felt him seize her hand:

"Come!"

All the seas of the world tumbled about her heart. He was drawing her into them: he would drown her. She gripped with both hands at the iron railing.

"Come!"

No! No! No! It was impossible. Her hands clutched the iron in frenzy. Amid the seas she sent a cry of anguish!

"Eveline! Evvy!"

He rushed beyond the barrier and called to her to follow. He was shouted at to go on but he still called to her. She set her white face to him, passive, like a helpless animal. Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition.

ZONE OF QUIET [1]

by Ring W. Lardner

(1885-1933)

Ring Lardner was born in Michigan in 1885. He received his education from the Armour Institute of Technology at Chicago. For a time he was a newspaper reporter but later turned to editing and syndicate writing. His first work was done as a sports writer, but he now devotes his time to the short story. His humor is based in part on his racy use of the vernacular and the language of illiteracy, and is typically American through and through. He has written a number of books, among which are *You Know Me, Al; Gullible's Travels; How to Write Short Stories;* and *Round Up.*

"Well," said the Doctor briskly, "how do you feel?"

"Oh, I guess I'm all right," replied the man in bed. "I'm still kind of drowsy, that's all."

"You were under the anesthetic an hour and a half. It's no wonder you aren't wide awake yet. But you'll be better after a good night's rest, and I've left something with Miss Lyons that'll make you sleep. I'm going along now. Miss Lyons will take good care of you."

"I'm off at seven o'clock," said Miss Lyons. "I'm going to a show with my G. F. But Miss Halsey's all right. She's the night floor nurse. Anything you want, she'll get it for you. What can I give him to eat, Doctor?"

"Nothing at all; not till after I've been here tomorrow. He'll be better off without anything. Just see that he's kept quiet. Don't let him talk, and don't talk to him; that is, if you can help it."

"Help it!" said Miss Lyons. "Say, I can be old lady Sphinx herself when I want to! Sometimes I sit for hours

[1] Reprinted from *The Love Nest* by Ring W. Lardner. Copyright, 1926, by Charles Scribner's Sons. By permission of the publishers.

—not alone, neither—and never say a word. Just think and think. And dream.

"I had a G. F. in Baltimore, where I took my training; she used to call me Dummy. Not because I'm dumb like some people—you know—but because I'd sit there and not say nothing. She'd say, 'A penny for your thoughts, Eleanor.' That's my first name—Eleanor."

"Well, I must run along. I'll see you in the morning."

"Good-by, Doctor," said the man in bed, as he went out.

"Good-by, Doctor Cox," said Miss Lyons as the door closed.

"He seems like an awful nice fella," said Miss Lyons. "And a good doctor, too. This is the first time I've been on a case with him. He gives a girl credit for having some sense. Most of these doctors treat us like they thought we were Mormons or something. Like Doctor Holland. I was on a case with him last week. He treated me like I was a Mormon or something. Finally, I told him, I said, 'I'm not as dumb as I look.' She died Friday night."

"Who?" asked the man in bed.

"The woman; the case I was on," said Miss Lyons.

"And what did the doctor say when you told him you weren't as dumb as you look?"

"I don't remember," said Miss Lyons. "He said, 'I hope not,' or something. What *could* he say? Gee! It's quarter to seven. I hadn't no idear it was so late. I must get busy and fix you up for the night. And I'll tell Miss Halsey to take good care of you. We're going to see 'What Price Glory?' I'm going with my G. F. Her B. F. gave her the tickets and he's going to meet us after the show and take us to supper.

"Marian—that's my G. F.—she's crazy wild about him.

And he's crazy about her, to hear her tell it. But I said to her this noon—she called me up on the phone—I said to her, 'If he's so crazy about you, why don't he propose? He's got plenty of money and no strings tied to him, and as far as I can see there's no reason why he shouldn't marry you if he wants you as bad as you say he does.' So she said maybe he was going to ask her tonight. I told her, 'Don't be silly! Would he drag me along if he was going to ask you?'

"That about him having plenty of money, though, that's a joke. He told her he had and she believes him. I haven't met him yet, but he looks in his picture like he's lucky if he's getting twenty-five dollars a week. She thinks he must be rich because he's in Wall Street. I told her, I said, 'That being in Wall Street don't mean nothing. What does he do there? is the question. You know they have to have janitors in those buildings just the same like anywhere else.' But she thinks he's God or somebody.

"She keeps asking me if I don't think he's the best-looking thing I ever saw. I tell her yes, sure, but between you and I, I don't believe anybody'd ever mistake him for Richard Barthelmess.

"Oh, say! I saw him the other day, coming out of the Algonquin! He's the best-looking thing! Even better-looking than on the screen. Roy Stewart."

"What about Roy Stewart?" asked the man in bed.

"Oh, he's the fella I was telling you about," said Miss Lyons. "He's my G. F.'s B. F."

"Maybe I'm a D. F. not to know, but would you tell me what a B. F. and G. F. are?"

"Well, you *are* dumb, aren't you!" said Miss Lyons. "A G. F., that's a girl friend, and a B. F. is a boy friend. I thought everybody knew that.

"I'm going out now and find Miss Halsey and tell her to be nice to you. But maybe I better not."

"Why not?" asked the man in bed.

"Oh, nothing. I was just thinking of something funny that happened last time I was on a case in this hospital. It was the day the man had been operated on and he was the best-looking somebody you ever saw. So when I went off duty I told Miss Halsey to be nice to him, like I was going to tell her about you. And when I came back in the morning he was dead. Isn't that funny?"

"Very!"

"Well," said Miss Lyons, "did you have a good night? You look a lot better, anyway. How'd you like Miss Halsey? Did you notice her ankles? She's got pretty near the smallest ankles I ever saw. Cute. I remember one day Tyler—that's one of the internes—he said if he could just see our ankles, mine and Miss Halsey's, he wouldn't know which was which. Of course we don't look anything alike other ways. She's pretty close to thirty and—well, nobody'd ever take her for Julia Hoyt. Helen."

"Who's Helen?" asked the man in bed.

"Helen Halsey. Helen; that's her first name. She was engaged to a man in Boston. He was going to Tufts College. He was going to be a doctor. But he died. She still carries his picture with her. I tell her she's silly to mope about a man that's been dead four years. And besides a girl's a fool to marry a doctor. They've got too many alibis.

"When I marry somebody, he's got to be a somebody that has regular office hours like he's in Wall Street or somewhere. Then when he don't come home, he'll have to think up something better than being 'on a case.' I used to use that on my sister when we were living together.

When I happened to be out late, I'd tell her I was on a case. She never knew the difference. Poor sis! She married a terrible oil can! But she didn't have the looks to get a real somebody. I'm making this for her. It's a bridge table cover for her birthday. She'll be twenty-nine. Don't that seem old?"

"Maybe to you; not to me," said the man in bed.

"You're about forty, aren't you?" said Miss Lyons.

"Just about."

"And how old would you say I am?"

"Twenty-three."

"I'm twenty-five," said Miss Lyons.

"Twenty-five and forty. That's fifteen years' difference. But I know a married couple that the husband is forty-five and she's only twenty-four, and they get along fine."

"I'm married myself," said the man in bed.

"You would be!" said Miss Lyons. "The last four cases I've been on was all married men. But at that, I'd rather have any kind of a man than a woman. I hate women! I mean sick ones. They treat a nurse like a dog, especially a pretty nurse. What's that you're reading?"

"*Vanity Fair*," replied the man in bed.

"*Vanity Fair*. I thought that was a magazine."

"Well, there's a magazine *and* a book. This is the book."

"Is it about a girl?"

"Yes."

"I haven't read it yet. I've been busy making this thing for my sister's birthday. She'll be twenty-nine. It's a bridge table cover. When you get that old, about all there is left is bridge or cross-word puzzles. Are you a puzzle fan? I did them religiously for a while, but I got sick of them. They put in such crazy words. Like one day they had a word with only three letters and it said 'A e-longated

fish' and the first letter had to be an *e*. And only three letters. That *couldn't* be right! So I said if they put things wrong like that, what's the use? Life's too short. And we only live once. When you're dead, you stay a long time dead.

"That's what a B. F. of mine used to say. He was a caution! But he was crazy about me. I might of married him only for a G. F. telling him lies about me. And called herself my friend! Charley Pierce."

"Who's Charley Pierce?"

"That was my B. F. that the other girl lied to him about me. I told him, I said, 'Well, if you believe all them stories about me, maybe we better part once and for all. I don't want to be tied up to a somebody that believes all the dirt they hear about me.' So he said he didn't really believe it and if I would take him back he wouldn't quarrel with me no more. But I said I thought it was best for us to part. I got their announcement two years ago, while I was still in training in Baltimore."

"Did he marry the girl that lied to him about you?"

"Yes, the poor fish! And I bet he's satisfied! They're a match for each other! He was all right, though, at that, till he fell for her. He used to be so thoughtful of me, like I was his sister or something.

"I like a man to *respect* me. Most fellas wants to kiss you before they know your name.

"Golly! I'm sleepy this morning! And got a right to be, too. Do you know what time I got home last night, or this morning, rather? Well, it was half past three. What would mama say if she could see her little girl now! But we did have a good time. First we went to the show—'What Price Glory?'—I and my G. F.—and afterwards her B. F. met us and took us in a taxi down to Barney Gallant's. Peewee Byers has got the orchestra there now.

Used to be with Whiteman's. Gee! How he can dance! I mean Roy."

"Your G. F.'s B. F.?"

"Yes, but I don't believe he's as crazy about her as she thinks he is. Anyway—but this is a secret—he took down the phone number of the hospital while Marian was out powdering her nose, and he said he'd give me a ring about noon. Gee! I'm sleepy! Roy Stewart!"

"Well," said Miss Lyons, "how's my patient? I'm twenty minutes late, but honest, it's a wonder I got up at all! Two nights in succession is too much for this child!"

"Barney Gallant's again?" asked the man in bed.

"No, but it was dancing, and pretty near as late. It'll be different tonight. I'm going to bed just the minute I get home. But I did have a dandy time. And I'm just crazy about a certain somebody."

"Roy Stewart?"

"How'd you guess it? But honest, he's wonderful! And so different than most of the fellas I've met. He says the craziest things, just keeps you in hysterics. We were talking about books and reading, and he asked me if I liked poetry—only he called it 'poultry'—and I said I was wild about it and Edgar M. Guest was just about my favorite, and then I asked him if he liked Kipling and what do you think he said? He said he didn't know; he'd never kipled.

"He's a scream! We just sat there in the house till half past eleven and didn't do nothing but just talk and the time went like we was at a show. He's better than a show. But finally I noticed how late it was and I asked him didn't he think he better be going and he said he'd go if I'd go with him, so I asked him where could we go at that hour of night, and he said he knew a road-house just a

little ways away, and I didn't want to go, but he said we wouldn't stay for only just one dance, so I went with him. To the Jericho Inn.

"I don't know what the woman thought of me where I stay, going out that time of night. But he *is* such a wonderful dancer and such a perfect gentleman! Of course we had more than one dance and it was after two o'clock before I knew it. We had some gin, too, but he just kissed me once and that was when we said good night."

"What about your G. F., Marian? Does she know?"

"About Roy and I? No. I always say that what a person don't know don't hurt them. Besides, there's nothing *for* her to know—yet. But listen: If there was a chance in the world for her, if I thought he cared anything about her, I'd be the last one in the world to accept his intentions. I hope I'm not that kind! But as far as anything serious between them is concerned, well, it's cold. I happen to *know* that! She's not the girl for him.

"In the first place, while she's pretty in a way, her complexion's bad and her hair's scraggy and her figure, well, it's like some woman in the funny pictures. And she's not peppy enough for Roy. She'd rather stay home than do anything. Stay home! It'll be time enough for that when you can't get anybody to take you out.

"She'd never make a wife for him. He'll be a rich man in another year; that is, if things go right for him in Wall Street like he expects. And a man as rich as he'll be wants a wife that can live up to it and entertain and step out once in a while. He don't want a wife that's a drag on him. And he's too good-looking for Marian. A fella as good-looking as him needs a pretty wife or the first thing you know some girl that is pretty will steal him off of you. But it's silly to talk about them marrying each

other. He'd have to ask her first, and he's not going to. I know! So I don't feel at all like I'm trespassing.

"Anyway, you know the old saying, everything goes in love. And I— But I'm keeping you from reading your book. Oh, yes; I almost forgot a T. L. that Miss Halsey said about you. Do you know what a T. L. is?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, you give me one and I'll give you this one."

"But I haven't talked to anybody but the Doctor. I can give you one from myself. He asked me how I liked you and I said all right."

"Well, that's better than nothing. Here's what Miss Halsey said: She said if you were shaved and fixed up, you wouldn't be bad. And now I'm going out and see if there's any mail for me. Most of my mail goes to where I live, but some of it comes here sometimes. What I'm looking for is a letter from the state board telling me if I passed my state examination. They ask you the craziest questions. Like 'Is ice a disinfectant?' Who cares! Nobody's going to waste ice to kill germs when there's so much of it needed in high-balls. Do you like high-balls? Roy says it spoils whisky to mix it with water. He takes it straight. He's a terror! But maybe you want to read."

"Good morning," said Miss Lyons. "Did you sleep good?"

"Not so good," said the man in bed. "I—"

"I bet you got more sleep than I did," said Miss Lyons. "He's the most persistent somebody I ever knew! I asked him last night, I said, 'Don't you never get tired of dancing?' So he said, well, he did get tired of dancing with some people, but there was others who he never got tired

of dancing with them. So I said, 'Yes, Mr. Jollier, but I wasn't born yesterday and I know apple sauce when I hear it and I bet you've told that to fifty girls.' I guess he really did mean it, though.

"Of course most anybody'd rather dance with slender girls than stout girls. I remember a B. F. I had one time in Washington. He said dancing with me was just like dancing with nothing. That sounds like he was insulting me, but it was really a compliment. He meant it wasn't any effort to dance with me like with some girls. You take Marian, for instance, and while I'm crazy about her, still that don't make her a good dancer and dancing with her must be a good deal like moving the piano or something.

"I'd die if I was fat! People are always making jokes about fat people. And there's the old saying, 'Nobody loves a fat man.' And it's even worse with a girl. Besides people making jokes about them and don't want to dance with them and so forth, besides that they're always trying to reduce and can't eat what they want to. I bet, though, if I was fat, I'd eat everything in sight. Though I guess not, either. Because I hardly eat anything as it is. But they do make jokes about them.

"I'll never forget one day last winter, I was on a case in Great Neck and the man's wife was the fattest thing! So they had a radio in the house and one day she saw in the paper where Bugs Baer was going to talk on the radio and it would probably be awfully funny because he writes so crazy. Do you ever read his articles? But this woman, she was awfully sensitive about being fat and I nearly died sitting there with her listening to Bugs Baer, because his whole talk was all about some fat woman and he said the craziest things, but I couldn't laugh on account of she being there in the room with me. One thing he said was that the woman, this woman he was talking

about, he said she was so fat that she wore a wrist watch on her thumb. Henry J. Belden."

"Who is Henry J. Belden? Is that the name of Bugs Baer's fat lady?"

"No, you crazy!" said Miss Lyons. "Mr. Belden was the case I was on in Great Neck. He died."

"It seems to me a good many of your cases die."

"Isn't it a scream!" said Miss Lyons. "But it's true; that is, it's been true lately. The last five cases I've been on has all died. Of course it's just luck, but the girls have been kidding me about it and calling me a jinx, and when Miss Halsey saw me here the evening of the day you was operated, she said, 'God help him!' That's the night floor nurse's name. But you're going to be mean and live through it and spoil my record, aren't you? I'm just kidding. Of course I want you to get all right.

"But it *is* queer, the way things have happened, and it's made me feel kind of creepy. And besides, I'm not like some of the girls and don't care. I get awfully fond of some of my cases and I hate to see them die, especially if they're men and not very sick and treat you half-way decent and don't yell for you the minute you go out of the room. There's only one case I was ever on where I didn't mind her dying and that was a woman. She had nephritis. Mrs. Judson.

"Do you want some gum? I chew it just when I'm nervous. And I always get nervous when I don't have enough sleep. You can bet I'll stay home tonight, B. F. or no B. F. But anyway he's got an engagement tonight, some directors' meeting or something. He's the busiest somebody in the world. And I told him last night, I said, 'I should think you'd need sleep, too, even more than I do because you have to have all your wits about you in your business or those big bankers would take advantage and

rob you. You can't afford to be sleepy,' I told him.

"So he said, 'No, but of course it's all right for you, because if you go to sleep on your job, there's no danger of you doing any damage except maybe give one of your patients a bichloride of mercury tablet instead of an alcohol rub.' He's terrible! But you can't help from laughing.

"There was four of us in the party last night. He brought along his B. F. and another girl. She was just blah, but the B. F. wasn't so bad, only he insisted on me helping him drink a half a bottle of Scotch, and on top of gin, too. I guess I was the life of the party; that is, at first. Afterwards I got sick and it wasn't so good.

"But at first I was certainly going strong. And I guess I made quite a hit with Roy's B. F. He knows Marian, too, but he won't say anything, and if he does, I don't care. If she don't want to lose her beaus, she ought to know better than to introduce them to all the pretty girls in the world. I don't mean that I'm any Norma Talmadge, but at least—well—but I sure was sick when I *was* sick!

"I must give Marian a ring this noon. I haven't talked to her since the night she introduced me to him. I've been kind of scared. But I've got to find out what she knows. Or if she's sore at me. Though I don't see how she can be, do you? But maybe you want to read."

"I called Marian up, but I didn't get her. She's out of town but she'll be back tonight. She's been out on a case. Hudson, New York. That's where she went. The message was waiting for her when she got home the other night, the night she introduced me to Roy."

"Good morning," said Miss Lyons.

"Good morning," said the man in bed. "Did you sleep enough?"

"Yes," said Miss Lyons. "I mean no, not enough."

"Your eyes look bad. They almost look as if you'd been crying."

"Who? Me? It'd take more than—I mean, I'm not a baby! But go on and read your book."

"Well, good morning," said Miss Lyons. "And how's my patient? And this is the last morning I can call you that, isn't it? I think you're mean to get well so quick and leave me out of a job. I'm just kidding. I'm glad you're all right again, and I can use a little rest myself."

"Another big night?" asked the man in bed.

"Pretty big," said Miss Lyons. "And another one coming. But tomorrow I won't ever get up. Honest, I danced so much last night that I thought my feet would drop off. But he certainly is a dancing fool! And the nicest somebody to talk to that I've met since I came to this town. Not a smart Alex and not always trying to be funny like some people, but just nice. He understands. He seems to know just what you're thinking. George Morse."

"George Morse!" exclaimed the man in bed.

"Why yes," said Miss Lyons. "Do you know him?"

"No. But I thought you were talking about this Stewart, this Roy."

"Oh, him!" said Miss Lyons. "I should say not! He's private property; other people's property, not mine. He's engaged to my G. F. Marian. It happened day before yesterday, after she got home from Hudson. She was on a case up there. She told me about it night before last. I told her congratulations. Because I wouldn't hurt her feelings for the world! But heavens! what a mess she's going to be in, married to that dumb-bell. But of course some people can't be choosey. And I doubt if they ever get married unless some friend loans him the price of a license.

"He's got her believing he's in Wall Street, but I bet if he ever goes there at all, it's to sweep it. He's one of these kind of fellas that's got a great line for a little while, but you don't want to live with a clown. And I'd hate to marry a man that all he thinks about is to step out every night and dance and drink.

"I had a notion to tell her what I really thought. But that'd only of made her sore, or she'd of thought I was jealous or something. As if I couldn't of had him myself! Though even if he wasn't so awful, if I'd liked him instead of loathed him, I wouldn't of taken him from her on account of she being my G. F. And especially while she was out of town.

"He's the kind of a fella that'd marry a nurse in the hopes that some day he'd be an invalid. You know, that kind.

"But say—did you ever hear of J. P. Morgan and Company? That's where my B. F. works, and he don't claim to own it neither. George Morse.

"Haven't you finished that book yet?"

TRAVEL IS SO BROADENING [1]

by SINCLAIR LEWIS

(1885 - 1951)

SINCLAIR LEWIS was born in Minnesota in 1885. He engaged in reportorial and editorial work in New York, at the same time writing short stories and novels. With the publication of *Main Street*, a study of a small town, he achieved wide recognition and provoked much criticism as a realist. He followed this book with *Babbitt*, one of the most discussed novels of the century. Among those which he has since written are *Arrowsmith* and *Dodsworth*.

WELL, I want to tell you, Mrs. Babbitt, and I know Mrs. Schmaltz heartily agrees with me, that we've never enjoyed a dinner more—that was some of the finest fried chicken I ever tasted in my life—and it certainly is a mighty great pleasure to be able to just have this quiet evening with you and George. Personally, I'm just as glad the Reverend and his wife couldn't come. I yield to no one in my admiration for Reverend Hickenlooper—as you say, there's probably no greater influence for Christian manhood in Zenith—but it's mighty nice to be able to have a quiet chin with you and George.

Now, George, about this trip to the Yellowstone you were asking about.

I don't know as I can help an old, trained, long-distance motorist like you, with your wealth of experience, though I never did agree with you about not going into low gear in descending steep hills, but I guess you've got me beat

[1] From *The Man Who Knew Coolidge* by Sinclair Lewis. Copyright, 1928, by Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc.

on long-distance motoring, and I've often said to Mrs. Schmaltz—haven't I, Mame!—that there sure is one thing I envy George F. Babbitt for, and that's the time he drove three hundred and sixteen miles in one day, between dawn and midnight. But I don't pretend to have that magnificent physical make-up of yours, George, and I've never been able to stand more'n two hundred and ninety-eight miles in one day's tour, and, you might say, really enjoy it and feel I was relaxing.

But same time, any helpful information that I can give you that may be of help to you on your trip, if you decide to make it next summer, I'm certainly mighty glad to give you, if you find it helpful.

Now I myself, I didn't quite get to Yellowstone Park. You know, it's a funny thing how many folks in this man's town think I drove clear from Zenith to Yellowstone Park. I've never claimed anything of the kind.

It's true that when I gave my little talk before the West Side Bridge Club about my trip, they billed it—and in a brief way the West Side Tidings column of the *Evening Advocate* spoke of it—as an account of a trip clear to Yellowstone Park.

But it wasn't a trip clear to Yellowstone Park. The fact is, and I've always been the first to acknowledge it, I didn't get clear to Yellowstone Park but only to the Black Hills, in North Dakota.

The fact is, not only did I want to see the scenic and agricultural wonders of Minnesota and Wisconsin and Dakota and all like that, but Mame has a brother-in-law —I'm sure Mrs. Schmaltz will excuse me for speaking of family matters, in the presence of old friends like you two —and she has this brother-in-law that had met with misfortune, and one of the objects of our trip was to stop and see if we couldn't help him straighten out his affairs—

why say, the poor devil was in such stresses and difficult straits that he'd actually had to borrow money to help him carry on his business, he's in the drug and stationery business. Why, say—

And a mighty fine gentleman he is, and his wife is a mighty bright cultured little woman; she subscribes to the *Ladies' Home Journal* and reads it right through every month. And poor old Lafayette—that's Mrs. Schmaltz's brother-in-law's name—he was very well educated; he not only went through a pharmacy college and got his degree, but he also studied cost-accountancy by mail. But somehow he just couldn't make a go of it. I guess he was kind of a dreamer. When he started his first drug-store, he also took an agency for the Florida Transplanted Palm and Orange Tree Company, and in Dakota he couldn't hardly sell any palms at all—those Swede farmers may be all right as farmers, but they ain't up to the cultural point of palms yet. And then later in another town he went into partnership with a gentleman that had found oil there, and also wanted to start a radiator factory—

And say, that wasn't such a bad idea as it sounded. Of course this was in a town where there wasn't any iron or coal anywheres around, and the railroad connections wasn't very good, but still, it was cold as hell—excuse me, Mrs. Babbitt—it was awful' cold in the winter, and where do you need radiators as much as where it's cold? But still, things didn't work out quite right. Come to find out, there wasn't any oil in the oil field, and somehow the radiator factory couldn't seem to compete with the trust, and so poor old Lafayette lost money almost as fast as he made it.

So when we drove out to see him—

You know how bad luck besets the just with the unjust, and say, by this time, poor old Lafe and his wife

were so hard up against it that they didn't even have an automobile!

And their radio was so old and so cheap that they couldn't hardly get Minneapolis on it!

Well, that'll give you an idea about how miserably poor and pursued by ill fortune they were—they lived in Tomahawk City, North Dakota.

Well, so, to make a long story short, Mame and I went to see him, and I gave him what advice I could, and then we ran on and gave the Black Hills the once-over, but we didn't have the time to make Yellowstone Park, but still, that was only four, or maybe it might have been six or eight hundred miles farther on, so I can give you practically a detailed description of the road and stopping-places and so on for the whole distance.

And say, I certainly do recommend your making the trip. They can say what they want to. Some people claim that reading books is the greatest cultural influence, and still others maintain that you can get the most in the quickest split-second time by listening to lectures, but what I always say is, "There's nothing more broadening than travel."

Well, now you just take this, just for an example: When I crossed Minnesota, I found—in fact I saw it myself, first-hand—that there were as many Swedes as Germans there. And funny names—say, they certainly had the funniest names! Swanson and Kettleson and Shipstead, and all like that—simply screams. I says to Mame, "Well, Mrs. Schmaltz," I says—I often call her that when we're funning around—"Well, Mrs. Schmaltz," I says, "you wanted to get a kick out of this trip, and here you got it," I says, "in all these funny names."

And all like that.

We get to thinking, here in Zenith, that everybody, I mean every *normal* fellow, lives just like we do, but out there in Minnesota I found a lot of the folks never even heard of our mayor here in Zenith—they just talked about Minneapolis and Saint Paul politics! I tell you, travel like that gives a fellow a whole new set of insights into human character and how big the world is, after all, and as our pastor, Dr. Edwards, often says, the capacity of the Lord for producing new sets of psychological set-ups is practically, you might say, absolutely unlimited.

Well, so I'll give you the main, broad outlines of the trip. Considering that it must be about two thousand miles from here to Yellowstone Park, naturally I can't go into details, but just suggest the big towns that you want to make for, and general cautions about long-distance touring if you're going to do it scientifically.

Yes, thanks, I'll have a cigar, but I'm not drinking anything. Well, make it very mild. Fine, that's fine. After all, as I often tell my boy, Robby, since prohibition *is* a law of the land, we ought to drink nothing at all or only very little. That'll be fine. Whoa-up! Well, since you've poured it, can't waste it, eh? Just a little siphon. Fine! Attaboy!

Well, as I say, I'll make it short. We started out for Dakota, just Mame here and me—the children was busy with their schools and study—

I don't know if I've told you, but Delmerine has found she had more kind of talent for painting than for music, though to me she's got one of the nicest voices I ever heard in so young a girl, but she was informed by some of the best authorities that she'd do even better at art than at music, so she switched to the Art Institute, and

Robby had to sort of make up some extra courses this last summer—

But not to go into that, the point is that Mame and I started off just by ourselves.

Now I hope Mame will excuse me—she knows how I like to kid her now and then—but what I mean is, just about when we were ready to start, she got an idea it'd be a good idea to take along her old Aunt Sarah, that lives out here in Rosedale.

"Let's take Aunt Sarah along, and give her a good time," she says.

"Let's take who along and do what?" I says.

"Why, let's take Aunt Sarah. She hasn't ever been anywhere," she says.

"Fine!" I says. "Say, that'll be just elegant. Let's also and at the same time take along the St. Agatha Orphan Asylum, the Salvation Army, and the convalescents of the Zenith General Hospital," I says, "so we can have a really chummy time."

Well, with Mame here, I can't very well tell you all the remarks we passed, but anyway, we shoved Aunt Sarah into the discard—say, that old girl whistles through her teeth, and the only time she ever was kissed was when Brigham Young passed through here ninety-two years ago—but by golly, I got to admit it, Mame got back at me.

I'd had a kind of sneaking idea I might work in Jackie, our dog—and a mighty fine useful dog he is, too—but I had to swap Jackie for Aunt Sarah, and so we started off with nobody aboard except Mrs. Schmaltz and me.

Now I know that the first question you'll want to ask me is what kind of an outfit you ought to take along on a trip like this. I don't pretend to be any Ammunsun, and

if I've ever found any South Poles, the newspapers forgot to tell me about it. But I'll give you my own experience for what it's worth.

Now about clothes—

There's those that maintain a fellow on as long and you might call it adventurous trip like this had ought to just wear an old suit of regular clothes. And there's those that maintain you ought to wear corduroy. Say, many and many's the hour I've sat in on debates between these two schools. But as for me, say, give me a nice suit of khaki coat and pants, every time. It may get dirtier than hell, but it never shows it's dirty, so what difference does it make?

And Mame the same way. She had specially made up for her a nice khaki jacket and breeches, and while sometimes she used to worry, and ask me if it didn't make her look the least lee-tle bit broad in the hips, I used to say to her, "Hell—" Excuse me, Mrs. Babbitt. "Rats," I said to her, "if you're comfy in 'em and if you find 'em convenient for crawling through barb-wire fences and all like that, whose business is it," I asked her, "whether some folks think it makes you look broad amidships or not!"

Now, Mamie, don't you go giving me those dirty looks, because remember we're right in the bosom of the family, you might say.

And now here's one thing I found mighty important.

Aside from the regular shoes that you wear when driving—and they ought to be a good stout pair of shoes, because who knows when you may want to sneak into an orchard and steal some apples, or even go up on a hill to see a view, or something like that—you ought to take along a pair of easy shoes for the evening—also more elegant; show 'em when you arrive in one of these hick hotels that you may be dressed comfortable for the auto trip,

but back home you can dress just as good as the next fellow, and maybe better.

Personally, I was awful' fortunate. I had an old pair of pumps, and I had 'em blacked up and they looked almost practically as good as new.

Funny, I'll never forget buying those pumps.

Here's the way it happened:

I was in Chicago, on a business trip, you understand, and I happened to be wandering along South State Street, in the poorer section, and I come on a bargain sale of shoes and footwear, and I spotted these pumps, and they looked pretty good to me. And the fellow that owned the store, but he was a Kike, you understand, he come out, and he says—of course he spoke practically illiterate—and he says to me, "Hey, mister, I vill sell you dem shoes cheap"—you know how those fellows talk.

Well, I just looked at him in a kind of amused way, and of course I could see that he could see I wasn't the kind of ignorant bird he was accustomed to deal with, and I says to him, "Ah, so, my friend," I says, "so you'll sell them to me cheap, will you!"

"Sure," he says, "you bet; I'll let you have dem at a rock-bottoms price."

"Well, friend," I says to him, "I'm sure that's awful nice of you, but what makes you think—" And I just kind of laughed. "What makes you think," I said, "that I require any such articles of footwear?"

"Vell, I can tell dat you're a gentlemans that puts on a dress-suit frequent, and dese is real dress-suit shoes," he says. "Dey come from the bankrupt sale from the real bon-ton élite store from Chicago," he says, "in fact from Waffleheim and Spoor, and they're too good for my class of custom," he says.

Well, sir, just out of idle curiosity, I looked 'em over,

and upon my word, if I didn't think he was telling the truth, for once. Say, them pumps, if they was what they looked like they was, wasn't worth one cent less than fifteen bucks, or anyway twelve-fifty. Well, of course I got kind of all excited inside. I knew then just how this Doctor—well, whatever his name is that writes for the *Saturday Evening Post*, I knew just how he feels when he finds a first edition of Harold Bell Wright for a dollar and a quarter and later maybe he's able to sell it for a couple thousand.

Well, I tried not to look excited, and I said, casual, I said to him, "Well, brother, they look like they were about my size, and I'll give you two bucks for 'em."

Well, sir, you'd 've laughed if you could 've seen him go up in the air. Say, he just clawed the air. He hollers and shouts and he claims they're worth five-fifty. You know how these doggone foreigners carry on—and say, if you're a student of philosophy you'll realize that their actions also indicate an inner spiritual something, you might say, that indicates why they can't ever compete with the clear, sure, short-cut mentality of the Nordics. He waves his hands and—

Oh, you know.

But say, I'm afraid I'm drifting away from my subject a little. Fact is, I jewed him down, and I got 'em for three and a half, and say, they fitted like a glove, and I wore 'em at some of the finest parties and soirées in Zenith for five years, and then when we started on this Western tour, they were just the thing to take along to rest your feet in the evening. And be sure and take something like that—stylish but restful.

Now as to your auto equipment, George.

You want to have a Pull-U-Out or some other device

for getting you out of a mud-hole if you get stuck in it. It's perfectly true that wherever you go now, motor-touring in the United States, you find perfect cement roads. But sometimes— You know how it is. Here and there there's gaps in the perfect cement highway, and you will get stuck in the mud.

And of course you want chains along, and extra tires. And what I recommend especially is one of these stoves with solid alcohol. When you're touring, you get a little tired of restaurants where you can't get anything but a small steak and beef stew, but fact is that sometimes you'd like a little *food*, and if you happen to feel inclined that way, of course the only thing you can do is to cook it for yourself.

In 'most all these small towns you go into a place—well, outside it's got a big fine illuminated electric sign with "Eats" or something like that on it, so you think it's going to be a snappy up-to-date joint, but you get in and you find it's run by some retired farmer and his daughter and the old woman.

Pop's principal job is leaning on the cash register and annoying a toothpick. He's too busy thinking about what a civilized city guy he's become to do any work except play cashier—with six customers an hour!—or maybe he's admiring all the art treasures in the place—the snappy picture of two pears and a lobster, and the signs like "Watch Your Hat and Coat," and "No Trust, No Bust," and "Ham and Eggs Country Style, 20¢"—country style meaning they throw in a piece of Certain-teed asphalt-treated toast with the relics.

Then out in the kitchen is Ma, doing what she thinks is cooking. The only thing she don't burn is the drinking-water. And Daughter has the idea she's waiting on table. But Daughter ain't interested in anybody but traveling

salesmen that she thinks are unmarried—which no traveling salesmen is since God made little apples. And all over the place there's a nice pleasing odor of burnt steak and onions.

So you sit up on a nice high stool, that's cleaned regular once a day by wiping it off with the rag that they use to grease the griddle, and you say to Daughter, "Say, could you bring us some cornbeef hash?" And she looks at you like an evangelist looks at a guy that he thinks has put a lead quarter in the plate, and she says, "The hash is out."

And then you think—and you find out you ain't much of a thinker—you'll have a pork chop, or maybe a T-bone steak, or some roast beef, and then finally you says, kind of irritated, "Well, what can we get?"

"Say," she says, "don't get fresh! You can have a small steak or you can have ham and eggs—only I think the eggs is all out."

God! I've always held and maintained that America is the one and only nation that knows how to provide elegant chow, but even a patriot like me, sometimes I feel that we got this said elegant chow every place in the country except three: cities, towns, and farmhouses.

So you carry along a little stove.

And then you ought to have a windshield spotlight, and a spade, and—

(Here, by request of the publishers, are omitted thirty-seven other articles recommended by Mr. Schmaltz.—Editor.)

Well, the first day, what with one thing and another and packing, we didn't get off till noon, having had a light lunch before starting, and say, I could 've killed that Pole hired girl we had at that time—she cooked up some scrambled eggs and never let us know they was

ready, and they was all cold, and for a fellow that likes really nice tasty grub, a cold scrambled egg isn't hardly worth eating.

But anyway, we got away at exactly three minutes after twelve—I kind of kept a schedule of our timing on this trip, and mileage, and daily consumption of oil and gas, and say, if I had my figures here, I could show you that we got more mileage on Dainty Daisy gas than on Samson, with all the Samson claims for power-plus. And as I say, we got started kind of late, and so we didn't plan to make much of a run that day, but only to Mittewoc, a hundred and seventy-five miles.

I never like to run more than two hundred and fifty miles a day. I know you don't agree with me, George, but I feel that when you run three hundred or three hundred and fifty, you don't really see all the scenery as thoroughly and study the agriculture and other features of the country as closely as you might if you just jogged along at a nice steady forty-five or fifty miles an hour instead of speeding. But be that as it may. We planned to take it easy and not get in before seven-thirty.

Say, that day was a revelation of progress.

When I first drove that road, it was just a plain dirt road running through a lot of unkempt farms, and now every mile or so you'd find a dandy up-to-date hot-dog stand—some like log-cabins and some like Chinese pagodas or Indian wigwams or little small imitations of Mount Vernon about ten feet high, and all like that, and stocking every known refreshment for the inner man—hot dogs and apple pie and chewing-gum and cigars and so on and so forth—and of course up-to-date billboards all along the road to diversify it, and garages maybe every five miles, and in every town a dandy free auto camp providing free water and wood for the tourists. And so many

of the farmers quitting their old toilsome routine and selling apples and cider to the motorists—I asked one of 'em, by the way, how he could keep his supply up, and come to find out, he didn't have an apple tree on the place—he got 'em all from a grocery store in the next town. Oh, motoring certainly has made a great and wonderful change in the country!

We didn't have any special experiences that first day—just one or two little incidents. I remember there was a fellow, he looked like a hobo, he waved his hand and stopped us.

"Well, my friend, what do you want?" I says—he was a shabby-looking cuss.

"Could you give me a lift?" he says.

"A lift?" I says.

"Yuh, I'd like a lift," he says.

"You've got two good feet to walk on, haven't you?" I says.

"Yuh," he says, "but I'm going a long ways."

"Oh, you are, are you!" I says. "Look here, my friend, let me give you a piece of advice."

"I ain't asking for advice," he says. "I'm asking for a lift."

Then of course I got a little sore, him sassing me in that uncalled-for fashion, and I says, "Well, I might 've given you a lift," I says, "if you hadn't got so fresh, but now— Well, all I can say is, if you'd buckle down to business and tend to business and earn some money," I says, "you'd maybe have an auto of your own, and you wouldn't have to ask people for a lift. Good *day!*" I says, and I drove on. I guess maybe that taught him a lesson. "You buckle down to work and not waste time asking for a lift," I told him, "and maybe you'll have an auto of your own!"

Then we stopped in a little burg—awful little hick hamlet it was, called, if I remember rightly, New Paris, and we stopped for an ice-cream soda, and when I was parking, I bumped just the least little bit into the car ahead of me. Didn't hurt him one little bit, and just bent my bumper a little, but my God, to hear the other fellow squeal about it, you'd 've thought I'd smashed his car to pieces and killed his Aunt Jenny. Great big rube he was —fellow with no dignity.

Even though I was born and brought up a city man, I admire the farmer and honor his efforts. What, after all, would we do without wheat and corn and flax and barley and radishes and so on? But same time, a lot of those hicks have no manners or dignity. Like this fellow.

He rushed right across the sidewalk from where he'd been putting in the afternoon holding up the front of the Red Ball Grocery Store, I remember it was—and say, that's one of the best chains of grocery stores in the country—and he bawls:

"Hey, you hit my car!"

"I'm quite aware of the fact," I says, coldly—the big bum!—if he thought he could frighten *me!* And so I got out, and looked things over, and I'd just bumped his spare tire, on the back, the least little bit.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" he says.

"What am I going to do about it?" I says.

"Yes, what're you going to do about it?"

"Well, inasmuch and considering as I haven't perpetrated the least damage," I informed him, "it strikes me that probably I'm not going to do anything about it."

"We'll see about that!" he says.

"We certainly will!" I says. "You can call the officers of the law," I says, "and we'll see how they'll adjust matters. And I might just call to your attention the fact that

you're not parked at the requisite and regulation angle," I says, "and we'll see what the authorities have to say about *that!*"

Well, of course I was pulling an awful bluff. I didn't know what the parking regulations were, at all. But then I figured that probably he didn't, either! And of course I knew that if he did call the constabule, by heck, he'd do a lot of lying and falsifying and all those kind of things that make you so sick when you're dealing with a roughneck. But then, I was all prepared for him—I figured that I'd tell the cop I was a big city lawyer and knew more about motor law than anybody since God was a boy, and bluff him out.

And say, it worked like a charm!

This fellow positively got white.

"Well, you ought to be careful," he grumbles—you'd 've died to see him trying to crawl out of it—and say, that ended the whole matter.

And what I didn't tell him, and what I didn't feel called on to tell him, if he couldn't see it himself, was that the way I'd hit his spare tire—something stuck out and I'd smashed hell out of his valve stem, so when Mr. Farmer come to put it on, he'd have one fine awful time, and served him right for the way he'd talked to me—say, many's the time I've laughed when I thought about that poor hick, 'way off seventeen miles from Nowhere, with a puncture, starting to put on this bum tire!

So Mame and I went into the drug-store and I had a strawberry ice-cream soda, and she, if I remember rightly —correct me, Mame, if I'm wrong—she had a lemon phosphate, and then we drove to the nearest garage, and I had my bumper straightened.

That was a nice garage, too, for such a tiny little burg.

I drove up and tooted my horn, and out come a young fellow in overalls, and I said, "Say, Cap'n, I hit a mosquito up the road a piece, and I wonder if you could straighten my bumper."

"Sure," he says.

"Could you do it right away?" I says. "I've got a date up the road to meet Gertrude Ederle and swim across the Channel with her."

"Sure," he says. You could see (my God, think of what it must mean to live in a hog-wallow like that and not hardly ever meet any educated people except when they stopped like I did!)—you could see he appreciated a little real Kiwanis Club kidding.

And so he got busy, and say, with a jack he had that bumper straightened in about ten seconds, and so we drove on.

And those were about all the interesting incidents, and considering I want to get on and outline the whole itinerary for you—

Oh, there was one little thing.

We stopped at a farmhouse for a drink of water—not water for the radiator, you understand; isn't it one of the wonders of modern science the way the radiator of a really fine car don't hardly need refilling at all?—I mean just for some water to drink. Well, I went up to the front door, and some old hag of a farm-wife came to the door, and I took off my hat, just as polite as if she was an important customer in my store, and I says to her, "Madam, I wonder if my wife and I can trouble you for a drink of water."

Well, she stands there and looks at me—by golly, I got kind of irritated, discourtesy like that to a wayfarer—and she looks at me and she says, "You're the sixteenth autoist today that's stopped and asked for a drink of

water. And every time I've gone 'way down by the barn, to the pump, and brought it. And the last person, and she called herself a lady, kicked like all get out because she didn't think the glass I brought her was clean enough. And all I have to do is to cook and bake and sweep and mend and do for four men, and tend the chickens, and hoe the garden, and help milk the cows. And I'm getting tired of being a free waitress for city tourists on top of that!"

Well, there may have been a certain modicum of reason to what she said.

I tell you, George, I'm always the first to open his heart and purse-strings to the call of the poor and needy. Why say, here just a couple of months ago, we took up a collection at the Kiwanis Club to buy a newsboy a suit of clothes. But same *time*—

Why do these hicks insist on giving themselves away? Why can't they try to learn nice manners, like you and I do?

What I'd 've liked to do was to give her one quick wallop on the jaw, but I just raised my hat again, like I was the Beau of Brummell, and I says, "I am very sorry to have bothered you, madam! Good *afternoon!*"

And I marched off and never looked back once! I'll bet she felt ashamed, and I hope to God she did!

Along about five we stopped to get some hot dogs and sauerkraut and coffee at a mighty nice little burg, right up to date, all brick pavement and snappy little bungalows and a lovely movie palace and a new brick armory and one of the highest water-towers we saw on the whole trip and a dandy cigar-store called "The Hang-out," and important industrially, too—big cheese factory and a rubber factory—place I'd always wanted to see and had heard a lot about—it was called Carcassonne.

And then we hiked on, and we got to Mittewoc at 7.13 on the dot.

And then, if I can just get Mame to admit it, we had the father and mother of a row about where we were going to stay that night.

There was a nice hotel there—the Ishpeming Arms—nice big clean lobby with elegant deep leather rocking-chairs, and the brass spittoons shined up like they were tableware—and Mame thought we ought to go there.

But I says to her, "It isn't a question of money," I says. "I guess I can afford the best hotels about as well as the next fellow. But it never *hurts* to save a little money; and besides," I says, "it's half the fun, as well as information, of a trip like this to get right down among the common, ordinary folks that ride in flivvers," I said, "and I've heard they've got a dandy tourist auto camp here, camping and parking space free, and with cottages with bedclothes at a dollar a night," I said, "and I vote we try it once, and brush up against the common people, and if we don't like it tonight," I says, "we don't need to try it again."

Well, we argued a lot, but Mame is a mighty good little sport, if she'll let me say so in her presence, and make a long story short, we drove over to the tourist park.

Well, sir, it was as pretty a place and fixed up as swell as you'd want to see anywheres. It was right on the bank of the Appleseed River, and there was several nice willow trees scattered through the grounds, and even, if I remember rightly—correct me if I'm wrong, Mame—there was a nice big oak tree. Of course the grounds were just the least little bit dirty, but what could you expect, with forty to sixty people camping there every night?

They had a dandy little store, painted in an art yellow with a mighty artistic sign, "Ye Old Autoists' General

Store," that, say, that place had every want and necessity for a touring party, even with kids along. They carried tires and canvas water buckets and gas and canned goods and diapers and lollypops and cotton gloves and maps and magazines and near-beer and everything you could think of.

Then there was a lot of marked-out spaces for cars and for tents, for those that had tents, and a nice line of outdoor ovens with plenty of wood provided free, and dandy shower baths in tents, and finally about half a dozen cottages for them that didn't carry tents, and we got one. And for a dollar, say, it wasn't so bad—it had a double bed with nice clean linen, and a chair.

So we settled down, and I says to Mame, "Let's make out like we're just tourists, without a bean to our names," and she entered right into the spirit of the thing, and we bought a frying-pan and a stew-pan at the store, and some canned stuff, and we had a dandy little supper, cooked by Mame's own fair hands—canned vegetable soup, and canned wienies (say, did you ever know that wienies are named after Ween, a German city?), and fried potatoes, and to top it off, some chocolate-almond bars.

Well, some of the folks had started a big campfire, and we all sat around it, just like one big family, and we sang a lot of old-time songs—and what I always say is, these modern songs haven't got the melody and sentiment like those old ancient songs have—we sang "After the Ball," and "Daisy, Daisy, Gimme Your Answer True," and "Onward, Christian Soldiers," and "Toy Land," and "Two Little Girls in Blue," and all like that.

And I got to talking with a lot of different folks, and I say, hardly more'n 40 per cent. were up to the Chevrolet class, and yet they were as fine a bunch of folks as you'd

want to meet—I mean, just to idle a few hours away with. And I learned a lot of different facts that *I* hadn't known before—say, there's certainly nothing that broadens a fellow like traveling.

Just for an example, I learned that Chattanooga, Tennessee—or it might 've been Nashville—but anyway it's right on a fine river, and you can see the mountains from there. And I learned that the largest Presbyterian church in the country was in Seattle, Washington. And I learned that Zion City, Illinois—or is it Wisconsin?—this old hang-out of Dowie [1]—has not only a very large lace factory, which of course everybody knows, but also one of the largest biscuit factories in the country. And I learned from a gentleman who was a veterinarian that one of the best foods for dogs was cornmeal mush cooked up with slivers of meat, thus making what they call a balanced ration—for dogs, I mean.

And say, that was a mighty funny thing. This veterinarian, Dr. Lepewski, his name was, but he explained he was really of German extraction and not one of these Lithuanians or some foreign stock like that, he happened to mention that about a year ago, or it might have been longer than that—this Dr. Lepewski, I may say, wasn't any of your tin-can flivver tourists, in fact he was driving an Oakland, and a high-class gentleman in every way, and I guess he was just staying at the tourist camp for the fun of the adventure, like Mame and me—and he said he was in Chicago, here about a year or so ago, in a hotel—I think it was the LaSalle, but it may have been some other hotel—and he ran into—I'd just happened to mention that I came from Zenith, and he said that in this hotel he happened to run into a gentleman from Zenith.

[1] The patron saint and model for such organizations as the Anti-Saloon League and the Lord's Day Alliance. Like Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy, he preached Divine Healing of all ills until his unfortunate death.

Well, naturally, I was interested right away, and I said to him, "What was this gentleman's name?"

"Well, if I remember rightly," he said to me, "his name was Claude Bundy—in the sash and blind business. Do you happen to know him?"

"Well, sir," I says to the doctor, "can you beat that? Say, it's a pretty doggone small world after all, isn't it! No, I don't happen to know Claude himself, but several times I've met his cousin, Victor Bundy, the lawyer," I said, "and I imagine I must know several people who've known Claude!"

So that's how it went—a mighty profitable as well as pleasant evening, and Mame and I turned in and hit the hay sometime along about a quarter of eleven, and we slept pretty good, and next morning we rolled out about seven and got some breakfast at a little lunch-counter near there—

Eh?

My Lord, you're right, Mame!

It's eleven-fifteen, and we'll have to be trotting along home, and I haven't even completed my account of the trip as far as the Black Hills. Well, I'll tell you, George; we'll get together again soon, and I can tell you the rest in half an hour.

I've enjoyed the evening a whole lot, and I hope what I've told you may be helpful—

And oh, there is one thing I *must* say before we skip. Be sure and carry along a drinking-cup. Now there's various kinds. You can get a small glass in a metal case, or one of these folding metal cups, or just a plain enamel-ware cup. Now let me tell you in just a brief word my experience with each of these—

MARRIAGE À LA MODE [1]

by KATHARINE MANSFIELD

KATHARINE MANSFIELD was born in New Zealand in 1890, but was educated in London. She married John Middleton Murry, the English critic. She died in France in 1923. Several critics have ranked her with Chekhov and Maupassant in short-story writing; H. L. Mencken, however, has said of her stories: "The plain fact is that most of them were as hollow as jugs. Their people were simply animated sticks. . . . But there was a din in London and so all our young college professors and literary newspaper reporters concluded that a circus parade was passing." Usually subtle relationships between persons are the germ of her stories, not plot or idea, but in "Marriage à la Mode" idea is strikingly treated with an apparent intention. Her best books are *Bliss, The Garden Party,* and *The Dove's Nest.*

ON HIS way to the station William remembered with a fresh pang of disappointment that he was taking nothing down to the kiddies. Poor little chaps! It was hard lines on them. Their first words always were as they ran to greet him, "What have you got for me, daddy?" and he had nothing. He would have to buy them some sweets at the station. But that was what he had done for the past four Saturdays; their faces had fallen last time when they saw the same old boxes produced again.

And Paddy had said, "I had red ribbing on mine *bee*fore!"

And Johnny had said, "It's always pink on mine. I hate pink."

[1] Reprinted from *The Garden Party* by Katharine Mansfield, by and with the permission of and special arrangement with Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., authorized publishers.

But what was William to do? The affair wasn't so easily settled. In the old days, of course, he would have taken a taxi off to a decent toyshop and chosen them something in five minutes. But nowadays they had Russian toys, French toys, Serbian toys—toys from God knows where. It was over a year since Isabel had scrapped the old donkeys and engines and so on because they were so "dreadfully sentimental" and "so appallingly bad for the babies' sense of form."

"It's so important," the new Isabel had explained, "that they should like the right things from the very beginning. It saves so much time later on. Really, if the poor pets have to spend their infant years staring at these horrors, one can imagine them growing up and asking to be taken to the Royal Academy."

And she spoke as though a visit to the Royal Academy was certain immediate death to any one. . . .

"Well, I don't know," said William slowly. "When I was their age I used to go to bed hugging an old towel with a knot in it."

The new Isabel looked at him, her eyes narrowed, her lips apart.

"*Dear* William! I'm sure you did!" She laughed in the new way.

Sweets it would have to be, however, thought William gloomily, fishing in his pocket for change for the taxi-man. And he saw the kiddies handing the boxes round—they were awfully generous little chaps—while Isabel's precious friends didn't hesitate to help themselves. . . .

What about fruit? William hovered before a stall just inside the station. What about a melon each? Would they have to share that, too? Or a pineapple for Pad, and a melon for Johnny? Isabel's friends could hardly go sneaking up to the nursery at the children's meal-times. All the

same, as he bought the melon William had a horrible vision of one of Isabel's young poets lapping up a slice, for some reason, behind the nursery door.

With his two very awkward parcels he strode off to his train. The platform was crowded, the train was in. Doors banged open and shut. There came such a loud hissing from the engine that people looked dazed as they scurried to and fro. William made straight for a first-class smoker, stowed away his suit-case and parcels, and taking a huge wad of papers out of his inner pocket, he flung down in the corner and began to read.

"Our client moreover is positive. . . . We are inclined to reconsider . . . in the event of—" Ah, that was better. William pressed back his flattened hair and stretched his legs across the carriage floor. The familiar dull gnawing in his breast quietened down. "With regard to our decision—" He took out a blue pencil and scored a paragraph slowly.

Two men came in, stepped across him, and made for the farther corner. A young fellow swung his golf clubs into the rack and sat down opposite. The train gave a gentle lurch, they were off. William glanced up and saw the hot, bright station slipping away. A red-faced girl raced along by the carriages, there was something strained and almost desperate in the way she waved and called. "Hysterical!" thought William dully. Then a greasy, black-faced workman at the end of the platform grinned at the passing train. And William thought, "A filthy life!" and went back to his papers.

When he looked up again there were fields, and beasts standing for shelter under the dark trees. A wide river, with naked children splashing in the shallows, glided into sight and was gone again. The sky shone pale, and one bird drifted high like a dark fleck in a jewel.

"We have examined our client's correspondence files. . . ." The last sentence he had read echoed in his mind. "We have examined . . ." William hung on to that sentence, but it was no good; it snapped in the middle, and the fields, the sky, the sailing bird, the water, all said, "Isabel." The same thing happened every Saturday afternoon. When he was on his way to meet Isabel there began those countless imaginary meetings. She was at the station, standing just a little apart from everybody else; she was sitting in the open taxi outside; she was at the garden gate; walking across the parched grass; at the door, or just inside the hall.

And her clear, light voice said, "It's William," or "Hillo, William!" or "So William has come!" He touched her cool hand, her cool cheek.

The exquisite freshness of Isabel! When he had been a little boy, it was his delight to run into the garden after a shower of rain and shake the rosebush over him. Isabel was that rose-bush, petal-soft, sparkling and cool. And he was still that little boy. But there was no running into the garden now, no laughing and shaking. The dull, persistent gnawing in his breast started again. He drew up his legs, tossed the papers aside, and shut his eyes.

"What is it, Isabel? What is it?" he said tenderly. They were in their bedroom in the new house. Isabel sat on a painted stool before the dressing-table that was strewn with little black and green boxes.

"What is what, William?" And she bent forward, and her fine light hair fell over her cheeks.

"Ah, you know!" He stood in the middle of the strange room and he felt a stranger. At that Isabel wheeled round quickly and faced him.

"Oh, William!" she cried imploringly, and she held up the hairbrush: "Please! Please don't be so dreadfully

stuffy and—tragic. You're always saying or looking or hinting that I've changed. Just because I've got to know really congenial people, and go about more, and am frightfully keen on—on everything, you behave as though I'd—" Isabel tossed back her hair and laughed—"killed our love or something. It's so awfully absurd"—she bit her lip—"and it's so maddening, William. Even this new house and the servants you grudge me."

"Isabel!"

"Yes, yes, it's true in a way," said Isabel quickly. "You think they are another bad sign. Oh, I know you do. I feel it," she said softly, "every time you come up the stairs. But we couldn't have gone on living in that other poky little hole, William. Be practical, at least! Why, there wasn't enough room for the babies even."

No, it was true. Every morning when he came back from chambers it was to find the babies with Isabel in the back drawing-room. They were having rides on the leopard skin thrown over the sofa back, or they were playing shops with Isabel's desk for a counter, or Pad was sitting on the hearthrug rowing away for dear life with a little brass fire shovel, while Johnny shot at pirates with the tongs. Every evening they each had a pick-a-back up the narrow stairs to their fat old Nanny.

Yes, he supposed it was a poky little house. A little white house with blue curtains and a window-box of petunias. William met their friends at the door with "Seen our petunias? Pretty terrific for London, don't you think?"

But the imbecile thing, the absolutely extraordinary thing was that he hadn't the slightest idea that Isabel wasn't as happy as he. God, what blindness. He hadn't the remotest notion in those days that she really hated that inconvenient little house, that she thought the fat Nanny

was ruining the babies, that she was desperately lonely, pining for new people and new music and pictures and so on. If they hadn't gone to that studio party at Moira Morrison's—if Moira Morrison hadn't said as they were leaving, "I'm going to rescue your wife, selfish man. She's like an exquisite little Titania"—if Isabel hadn't gone with Moira to Paris—if—if . . .

The train stopped at another station. Bettingford. Good heavens! They'd be there in ten minutes. William stuffed the papers back into his pockets; the young man opposite had long since disappeared. Now the other two got out. The late afternoon sun shone on women in cotton frocks and little sunburnt, barefoot children. It blazed on a silky yellow flower with coarse leaves which sprawled over a bank of rock. The air ruffling through the window smelled of the sea. Had Isabel the same crowd with her this week-end, wondered William?

And he remembered the holidays they used to have, the four of them, with a little farm girl, Rose, to look after the babies. Isabel wore a jersey and her hair in a plait; she looked about fourteen. Lord! how his nose used to peel! And the amount they ate, and the amount they slept in that immense feather bed with their feet locked together. . . . William couldn't help a grim smile as he thought of Isabel's horror if she knew the full extent of his sentimentality.

"Hillo, William!" She was at the station after all, standing just as he had imagined, apart from the others, and—William's heart leapt—she was alone.

"Hallo, Isabel!" William stared. He thought she looked so beautiful that he had to say something. "You look very cool."

"Do I?" said Isabel. "I don't feel very cool. Come along,

your horrid old train is late. The taxi's outside." She put her hand lightly on his arm as they passed the ticket collector. "We've all come to meet you," she said. "But we've left Bobby Kane at the sweet shop, to be called for."

"Oh!" said William. It was all he could say for the moment.

There in the glare waited the taxi, with Bill Hunt and Dennis Green sprawling on one side, their hats tilted over their faces, while on the other, Moira Morrison, in a bonnet like a huge strawberry, jumped up and down.

"No ice! No ice! No ice!" she shouted gaily.

And Dennis chimed in from under his hat. "*Only* to be had from the fishmonger's."

And Bill Hunt, emerging, added, "With *whole* fish in it."

"Oh, what a bore!" wailed Isabel. And she explained to William how they had been chasing round the town for ice while she waited for him. "Simply everything is running down the steep cliffs into the sea, beginning with the butter."

"We shall have to anoint ourselves with the butter," said Dennis. "May thy head, William, lack not ointment."

"Look here," said William, "how are we going to sit? I'd better get up by the driver."

"No, Bobby Kane's by the driver," said Isabel. "You're to sit between Moira and me." The taxi started. "What have you got in those mysterious parcels?"

"De-cap-it-ated heads!" said Bill Hunt, shuddering beneath his hat.

"Oh, fruit!" Isabel sounded very pleased. "Wise William! A melon and a pineapple. How too nice!"

"No, wait a bit," said William, smiling. But he really was anxious. "I brought them down for the kiddies."

"Oh, my dear!" Isabel laughed, and slipped her hand

through his arm. "They'd be rolling in agonies if they were to eat them. No"—she patted his hand—"you must bring them something next time. I refuse to part with my pineapple."

"Cruel Isabel! Do let me smell it!" said Moira. She flung her arms across William appealingly. "Oh!" The strawberry bonnet fell forward: she sounded quite faint.

"A Lady in Love with a Pineapple," said Dennis, as the taxi drew up before a little shop with a striped blind. Out came Bobby Kane, his arms full of little packets.

"I do hope they'll be good. I've chosen them because of the colors. There are some round things which really look too divine. And just look at this nougat," he cried ecstatically, "just look at it! It's a perfect little ballet."

But at that moment the shopman appeared. "Oh, I forgot. They're none of them paid for," said Bobby, looking frightened. Isabel gave the shopman a note, and Bobby was radiant again. "Hallo, William! I'm sitting by the driver." And bareheaded, all in white, with his sleeves rolled up to the shoulders, he leapt into his place. "Avanti!" he cried. . . .

After tea the others went off to bathe, while William stayed and made his peace with the kiddies. But Johnny and Paddy were asleep, the rose-red glow had paled, bats were flying, and still the bathers had not returned. As William wandered downstairs, the maid crossed the hall carrying a lamp. He followed her into the sitting-room. It was a long room, colored yellow. On the wall opposite William some one had painted a young man, over life-size, with very wobbly legs, offering a wide-eyed daisy to a young woman who had one very short arm and one very long, thin one. Over the chairs and sofa there hung strips of black material, covered with big splashes like broken eggs, and everywhere one looked there seemed to be an

ash-tray full of cigarette ends. William sat down in one of the arm-chairs. Nowadays, when one felt with one hand down the sides, it wasn't to come upon a sheep with three legs or a cow that had lost one horn, or a very fat dove out of the Noah's Ark. One fished up yet another little paper-covered book of smudged-looking poems. . . . He thought of the wad of papers in his pocket, but he was too hungry and tired to read. The door was open; sounds came from the kitchen. The servants were talking as if they were alone in the house. Suddenly there came a loud screech of laughter and an equally loud "Sh!" They had remembered him. William got up and went through the French windows into the garden, and as he stood there in the shadow he heard the bathers coming up the sandy road; their voices rang through the quiet.

"I think it's up to Moira to use her little arts and wiles."

A tragic moan from Moira.

"We ought to have a gramophone for the week-ends that played 'The Maid of the Mountains.' "

"Oh, no! Oh, no!" cried Isabel's voice. "That's not fair to William. Be nice to him, my children! He's only staying until tomorrow evening."

"Leave him to me," cried Bobby Kane. "I'm awfully good at looking after people."

The gate swung open and shut. William moved on the terrace; they had seen him. "Hallo, William!" And Bobby Kane, flapping his towel, began to leap and pirouette on the parched lawn. "Pity you didn't come, William. The water was divine. And we all went to a little pub afterwards and had sloe gin."

The others had reached the house. "I say, Isabel," called Bobby, "would you like me to wear my Nijinsky dress tonight?"

"No," said Isabel, "nobody's going to dress. We're all starving. William's starving, too. Come along, *mes amis*, let's begin with sardines."

"I've found the sardines," said Moira, and she ran into the hall, holding a box high in the air.

"A Lady with a Box of Sardines," said Dennis gravely.

"Well, William, and how's London?" asked Bill Hunt, drawing the cork out of a bottle of whisky.

"Oh, London's not much changed," answered William.

"Good old London," said Bobby, very hearty, spearing a sardine.

But a moment later William was forgotten. Moira Morrison began wondering what color one's legs really were under water.

"Mine are the palest, palest mushroom color."

Bill and Dennis ate enormously. And Isabel filled glasses, and changed plates, and found matches, smiling blissfully. At one moment she said, "I do wish, Bill, you'd paint it."

"Paint what?" said Bill loudly, stuffing his mouth with bread.

"Us," said Isabel, "round the table. It would be so fascinating in twenty years' time."

Bill screwed up his eyes and chewed. "Light's wrong," he said rudely, "far too much yellow"; and went on eating. And that seemed to charm Isabel, too.

But after supper they were all so tired they could do nothing but yawn until it was late enough to go to bed. . . .

It was not until William was waiting for his taxi the next afternoon that he found himself alone with Isabel. When he brought his suit-case down into the hall, Isabel left the others and went over to him. She stooped down and picked up the suit-case. "What a weight!" she said,

and she gave a little awkward laugh. "Let me carry it! To the gate."

"No, why should you?" said William. "Of course not. Give it to me."

"Oh, please do let me," said Isabel. "I want to, really." They walked together silently. William felt there was nothing to say now.

"There," said Isabel triumphantly, setting the suitcase down, and she looked anxiously along the sandy road. "I hardly seem to have seen you this time," she said breathlessly. "It's so short, isn't it? I feel you've only just come. Next time—" The taxi came into sight. "I hope they look after you properly in London. I'm so sorry the babies have been out all day, but Miss Neil had arranged it. They'll hate missing you. Poor William, going back to London." The taxi turned. "Good-bye!" She gave him a little hurried kiss; she was gone.

Fields, trees, hedges streamed by. They shook through the empty, blind-looking little town, ground up the steep pull to the station.

The train was in. William made straight for a first-class smoker, flung back into the corner, but this time he let the papers alone. He folded his arms against the dull, persistent gnawing, and began in his mind to write a letter to Isabel.

The post was late as usual. They sat outside the house in long chairs under colored parasols. Only Bobby Kane lay on the turf at Isabel's feet. It was dull, stifling; the day drooped like a flag.

"Do you think there will be Mondays in Heaven?" asked Bobby childishly.

And Dennis murmured, "Heaven will be one long Monday."

But Isabel couldn't help wondering what had happened to the salmon they had for supper last night. She had meant to have fish mayonnaise for lunch and now . . .

Moira was asleep. Sleeping was her latest discovery. "It's *so* wonderful. One simply shuts one's eyes, that's all. It's *so* delicious."

When the old ruddy postman came beating along the sandy road on his tricycle one felt the handlebars ought to have been oars.

Bill Hunt put down his book. "Letters," he said complacently, and they all waited. But, heartless postman—O malignant world! There was only one, a fat one for Isabel. Not even a paper.

"And mine's only from William," said Isabel mournfully.

"From William—already?"

"He's sending you back your marriage lines as a gentle reminder."

"Does everybody have marriage lines? I thought they were only for servants."

"Pages and pages! Look at her! A Lady Reading a Letter," said Dennis.

My darling, precious Isabel. Pages and pages there were. As Isabel read on her feeling of astonishment changed to a stifled feeling. What on earth had induced William . . . ? How extraordinary it was . . . What could have made him . . . ? She felt confused, more and more excited, even frightened. It was just like William. Was it? It was absurd, of course, it must be absurd, ridiculous. "Ha, ha, ha! Oh, dear!" What was she to do? Isabel flung back in her chair and laughed till she couldn't stop laughing.

"Do, do tell us," said the others. "You must tell us."

"I'm longing to," gurgled Isabel. She sat up, gathered

the letter, and waved it at them. "Gather round," she said. "Listen, it's too marvelous. A love-letter!"

"A love-letter! But how divine!" *Darling, precious Isabel.* But she had hardly begun before their laughter interrupted her.

"Go on, Isabel, it's perfect."

"It's the most marvelous find."

"Oh, do go on, Isabel!"

God forbid, my darling, that I should be a drag on your happiness.

"Oh! oh! oh!"

"Sh! sh! sh!"

And Isabel went on. When she reached the end they were hysterical: Bobby rolled on the turf and almost sobbed.

"You must let me have it just as it is, entire, for my new book," said Dennis firmly. "I shall give it a whole chapter."

"Oh, Isabel," moaned Moira, "that wonderful bit about holding you in his arms!"

"I always thought those letters in divorce cases were made up. But they pale before this."

"Let me hold it. Let me read it, mine own self," said Bobby Kane.

But, to their surprise, Isabel crushed the letter in her hand. She was laughing no longer. She glanced quickly at them all; she looked exhausted. "No, not just now. Not just now," she stammered.

And before they could recover she had run into the house, through the hall, up the stairs into her bedroom. Down she sat on the side of the bed. "How vile, odious, abominable, vulgar," muttered Isabel. She pressed her eyes with her knuckles and rocked to and fro. And again she saw them, but not four, more like forty, laughing,

sneering, jeering, stretching out their hands while she read them William's letter. Oh, what a loathsome thing to have done. How could she have done it! *God forgive, my darling, that I should be a drag on your happiness.* William! Isabel pressed her face into the pillow. But she felt that even the grave bedroom knew her for what she was, shallow, tinkling, vain. . . .

Presently from the garden below there came voices.

"Isabel, we're all going for a bathe. Do come!"

"Come, thou wife of William!"

"Call her once before you go, call once yet!"

Isabel sat up. Now was the moment, now she must decide. Would she go with them, or stay here and write to William? Which, which should it be? "I must make up my mind." Oh, but how could there be any question? Of course she would stay here and write.

"Titania!" piped Moira.

"Isa-bel?"

No, it was too difficult. "I'll—I'll go with them, and write to William later. Some other time. Later. Not now. But I shall *certainly* write," thought Isabel hurriedly.

And, laughing in the new way, she ran down the stairs.

THE OUTSTATION[1]

by W. Somerset Maugham

W. Somerset Maugham was born in England in 1874. He was educated at King's School, Canterbury, at Heidelberg University, and at St. Thomas's Hospital, London, where he obtained his medical degree. He soon turned to writing and now has to his credit a long list of novels and plays in addition to collections of sketches, essays, and short stories. He is an energetic traveler, with the ability to see man in all parts of the world in relation to environment. Among his books are *Of Human Bondage, The Moon and Sixpence, The Painted Veil, The Trembling of a Leaf,* and *The Casuarina Tree.*

THE new assistant arrived in the afternoon. When the Resident, Mr. Warburton, was told that the prahu was in sight he put on his solar topee and went down to the landing-stage. The guard, eight little Dyak soldiers, stood to attention as he passed. He noted with satisfaction that their bearing was martial, their uniforms neat and clean, and their guns shining. They were a credit to him. From the landing-stage he watched the bend of the river round which in a moment the boat would sweep. He looked very smart in his spotless ducks and white shoes. He held under his arm a gold-headed Malacca cane which had been given him by the Sultan of Perak. He awaited the newcomer with mingled feelings. There was more work in the district than one man could properly do, and during his periodical tours of the country under his charge it had been inconvenient to leave the station in the hands of a

[1] From *The Casuarina Tree.* Copyright, 1926, by W. Somerset Maugham, and reprinted by special permission of Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., publishers.

native clerk, but he had been so long the only white man there that he could not face the arrival of another without misgiving. He was accustomed to loneliness. During the war he had not seen an English face for three years; and once when he was instructed to put up an afforestation officer he was seized with panic, so that when the stranger was due to arrive, having arranged everything for his reception, he wrote a note telling him he was obliged to go up-river, and fled; he remained away till he was informed by a messenger that his guest had left.

Now the prahu appeared in the broad reach. It was manned by prisoners, Dyaks under various sentences, and a couple of warders were waiting on the landing-stage to take them back to jail. They were sturdy fellows, used to the river, and they rowed with a powerful stroke. As the boat reached the side a man got out from under the attap awning and stepped on shore. The guard presented arms.

"Here we are at last. By God, I'm as cramped as the devil. I've brought you your mail."

He spoke with exuberant joviality. Mr. Warburton politely held out his hand.

"Mr. Cooper, I presume?"

"That's right. Were you expecting any one else?"

The question had a facetious intent, but the Resident did not smile.

"My name is Warburton. I'll show you your quarters. They'll bring your kit along."

He preceded Cooper along the narrow pathway and they entered a compound in which stood a small bungalow.

"I've had it made as habitable as I could, but of course no one has lived in it for a good many years."

It was built on piles. It consisted of a long living-room which opened on to a broad verandah, and behind, on each side of a passage, were two bedrooms.

"This'll do me all right," said Cooper.

"I daresay you want to have a bath and a change. I shall be very much pleased if you'll dine with me tonight. Will eight o'clock suit you?"

"Any old time will do for me."

The Resident gave a polite, but slightly disconcerted, smile and withdrew. He returned to the Fort where his own residence was. The impression which Allen Cooper had given him was not very favorable, but he was a fair man, and he knew that it was unjust to form an opinion on so brief a glimpse. Cooper seemed to be about thirty. He was a tall, thin fellow, with a sallow face in which there was not a spot of color. It was a face all in one tone. He had a large, hooked nose and blue eyes. When, entering the bungalow, he had taken off his topee and flung it to a waiting boy, Mr. Warburton noticed that his large skull, covered with short, brown hair, contrasted somewhat oddly with a weak, small chin. He was dressed in khaki shorts and a khaki shirt, but they were shabby and soiled; and his battered topee had not been cleaned for days. Mr. Warburton reflected that the young man had spent a week on a coasting steamer and had passed the last forty-eight hours lying in the bottom of a prahu.

"We'll see what he looks like when he comes in to dinner."

He went into his room where his things were as neatly laid out as if he had an English valet, undressed, and, walking down the stairs to the bathhouse, sluiced himself with cool water. The only concession he made to the climate was to wear a white dinner-jacket; but otherwise, in a boiled shirt and a high collar, silk socks and patent-leather shoes, he dressed as formally as though he were dining at his club in Pall Mall. A careful host, he went into the dining-room to see that the table was properly

laid. It was gay with orchids and the silver shone brightly. The napkins were folded into elaborate shapes. Shaded candles in silver candlesticks shed a soft light. Mr. Warburton smiled his approval and returned to the sitting-room to await his guest. Presently he appeared. Cooper was wearing the khaki shorts, the khaki shirt, and the ragged jacket in which he had landed. Mr. Warburton's smile of greeting froze on his face.

"Hulloa, you're all dressed up," said Cooper. "I didn't know you were going to do that. I very nearly put on a sarong."

"It doesn't matter at all. I daresay your boys were busy."

"You needn't have bothered to dress on my account, you know."

"I didn't. I always dress for dinner."

"Even when you're alone?"

"Especially when I'm alone," replied Mr. Warburton, with a frigid stare.

He saw a twinkle of amusement in Cooper's eyes, and he flushed an angry red. Mr. Warburton was a hot-tempered man; you might have guessed that from his red face with its pugnacious features and from his red hair, now growing white; his blue eyes, cold as a rule and observing, could flush with sudden wrath; but he was a man of the world and he hoped a just one. He must do his best to get on with this fellow.

"When I lived in London I moved in circles in which it would have been just as eccentric not to dress for dinner every night as not to have a bath every morning. When I came to Borneo I saw no reason to discontinue so good a habit. For three years, during the war, I never saw a white man. I never omitted to dress on a single occasion on which I was well enough to come in to dinner. You have

not been very long in this country; believe me, there is no better way to maintain the proper pride which you should have in yourself. When a white man surrenders in the slightest degree to the influences that surround him he very soon loses his self-respect, and when he loses his self-respect you may be quite sure that the natives will soon cease to respect him."

"Well, if you expect me to put on a boiled shirt and a stiff collar in this heat I'm afraid you'll be disappointed."

"When you are dining in your own bungalow you will, of course, dress as you think fit, but when you do me the pleasure of dining with me, perhaps you will come to the conclusion that it is only polite to wear the costume usual in civilized society."

Two Malay boys, in sarongs and songkoks, with smart white coats and brass buttons, came in, one bearing gin pahits, and the other a tray on which were olives and anchovies. Then they went in to dinner. Mr. Warburton flattered himself that he had the best cook, a Chinese, in Borneo, and he took great trouble to have as good food as in the difficult circumstances was possible. He exercised much ingenuity in making the best of his materials.

"Would you care to look at the menu?" he said, handing it to Cooper.

It was written in French and the dishes had resounding names. They were waited on by the two boys. In opposite corners of the room two more waved immense fans, and so gave movement to the sultry air. The fare was sumptuous and the champagne excellent.

"Do you do yourself like this every day?" said Cooper.

Mr. Warburton gave the menu a careless glance.

"I have not noticed that the dinner is any different from usual," he said. "I eat very little myself, but I make a point of having a proper dinner served to me every

night. It keeps the cook in practice and it's good discipline for the boys."

The conversation proceeded with effort. Mr. Warburton was elaborately courteous, and it may be that he found a slightly malicious amusement in the embarrassment which he thereby occasioned in his companion. Cooper had not been more than a few months in Sembulu, and Mr. Warburton's inquiries about friends of his in Kuala Solor were soon exhausted.

"By the way," he said presently, "did you meet a lad called Hennerley? He's come out recently, I believe."

"Oh, yes, he's in the police. A rotten bounder."

"I should hardly have expected him to be that. His uncle is my friend Lord Barraclough. I had a letter from Lady Barraclough only the other day asking me to look out for him."

"I heard he was related to somebody or other. I suppose that's how he got the job. He's been to Eton and Oxford and he doesn't forget to let you know it."

"You surprise me," said Mr. Warburton. "All his family have been at Eton and Oxford for a couple of hundred years. I should have expected him to take it as a matter of course."

"I thought him a damned prig."

"To what school did you go?"

"I was born in Barbados. I was educated there."

"Oh, I see."

Mr. Warburton managed to put so much offensiveness into his brief reply that Cooper flushed. For a moment he was silent.

"I've had two or three letters from Kuala Solor," continued Mr. Warburton, "and my impression was that young Hennerley was a great success. They say he's a first-rate sportsman."

"Oh, yes, he's very popular. He's just the sort of fellow they would like in K.S. I haven't got much use for the first-rate sportsman myself. What does it amount to in the long run that a man can play golf and tennis better than other people? And who cares if he can make a break of seventy-five at billiards? They attach a damned sight too much importance to that sort of thing in England."

"Do you think so? I was under the impression that the first-rate sportsman had come out of the war certainly no worse than any one else."

"Oh, if you're going to talk of the war then I do know what I'm talking about. I was in the same regiment as Hennerley and I can tell you that the men couldn't stick him at any price."

"How do you know?"

"Because I was one of the men."

"Oh, you hadn't got a commission."

"A fat chance I had of getting a commission. I was what was called a Colonial. I hadn't been to a public school and I had no influence. I was in the ranks the whole damned time."

Cooper frowned. He seemed to have difficulty in preventing himself from breaking into violent invective. Mr. Warburton watched him, his little blue eyes narrowed, watched him and formed his opinion. Changing the conversation, he began to speak to Cooper about the work that would be required of him, and as the clock struck ten he rose.

"Well, I won't keep you any more. I daresay you're tired by your journey."

They shook hands.

"Oh, I say, look here," said Cooper, "I wonder if you can find me a boy. The boy I had before never turned up when I was starting from K.S. He took my kit on board

and all that and then disappeared. I didn't know he wasn't there till we were out of the river."

"I'll ask my head-boy. I have no doubt he can find you some one."

"All right. Just tell him to send the boy along and if I like the look of him I'll take him."

There was a moon, so that no lantern was needed. Cooper walked across from the Fort to his bungalow.

"I wonder why on earth they've sent me a fellow like that?" reflected Mr. Warburton. "If that's the kind of man they're going to get out now I don't think much of it."

He strolled down his garden. The Fort was built on the top of a little hill and the garden ran down to the river's edge; on the bank was an arbor, and hither it was his habit to come after dinner to smoke a cheroot. And often from the river that flowed below him a voice was heard, the voice of some Malay too timorous to venture into the light of day, and a complaint or an accusation was softly wafted to his ears, a piece of information was whispered to him or a useful hint, which otherwise would never have come into his official ken. He threw himself heavily into a long rattan chair. Cooper! An envious, ill-bred fellow, bumptious, self-assertive and vain. But Mr. Warburton's irritation could not withstand the silent beauty of the night. The air was scented with the sweet-smelling flowers of a tree that grew at the entrance to the arbor, and the fireflies, sparkling dimly, flew with their slow and silvery flight. The moon made a pathway on the broad river for the light feet of Siva's bride, and on the further bank a row of palm trees was delicately silhouetted against the sky. Peace stole into the soul of Mr. Warburton.

He was a queer creature and he had had a singular

career. At the age of twenty-one he had inherited a considerable fortune, a hundred thousand pounds, and when he left Oxford he threw himself into the gay life which in those days (now Mr. Warburton was a man of four and fifty) offered itself to the young man of good family. He had his flat in Mount Street, his private hansom, and his hunting-box in Warwickshire. He went to all the places where the fashionable congregate. He was handsome, amusing and generous. He was a figure in the society of London in the early nineties, and society then had not lost its exclusiveness nor its brilliance. The Boer War which shook it was unthought of; the Great War which destroyed it was prophesied only by the pessimists. It was no unpleasant thing to be a rich young man in those days, and Mr. Warburton's chimney-piece during the season was packed with cards for one great function after another. Mr. Warburton displayed them with complacency. For Mr. Warburton was a snob. He was not a timid snob, a little ashamed of being impressed by his betters, nor a snob who sought the intimacy of persons who had acquired celebrity in politics or notoriety in the arts, nor the snob who was dazzled by riches; he was the naked, unadulterated common snob who dearly loved a lord. He was touchy and quick-tempered, but he would much rather have been snubbed by a person of quality than flattered by a commoner. His name figured insignificantly in *Burke's Peerage*, and it was marvelous to watch the ingenuity he used to mention his distant relationship to the noble family he belonged to; but never a word did he say of the honest Liverpool manufacturer from whom, through his mother, a Miss Gubbins, he had come by his fortune. It was the terror of his fashionable life that at Cowes, maybe, or at Ascot, when he was with a duchess

or even with a prince of the blood, one of these relatives would claim acquaintance with him.

His failing was too obvious not soon to become notorious, but its extravagance saved it from being merely despicable. The great whom he adored laughed at him, but in their hearts felt his adoration not unnatural. Poor Warburton was a dreadful snob, of course, but after all he was a good fellow. He was always ready to back a bill for an impecunious nobleman, and if you were in a tight corner you could safely count on him for a hundred pounds. He gave good dinners. He played whist badly, but never minded how much he lost if the company was select. He happened to be a gambler, an unlucky one, but he was a good loser, and it was impossible not to admire the coolness with which he lost five hundred pounds at a sitting. His passion for cards, almost as strong as his passion for titles, was the cause of his undoing. The life he led was expensive and his gambling losses were formidable. He began to plunge more heavily, first on horses, and then on the Stock Exchange. He had a certain simplicity of character and the unscrupulous found him an ingenuous prey. I do not know if he ever realized that his smart friends laughed at him behind his back, but I think he had an obscure instinct that he could not afford to appear other than careless of his money. He got into the hands of money-lenders. At the age of thirty-four he was ruined.

He was too much imbued with the spirit of his class to hesitate in the choice of his next step. When a man in his set had run through his money he went out to the colonies. No one heard Mr. Warburton repine. He made no complaint because a noble friend had advised a disastrous speculation, he pressed nobody to whom he had lent money

to repay it, he paid his debts (if he had only known it, the despised blood of the Liverpool manufacturer came out in him there), sought help from no one, and, never having done a stroke of work in his life, looked for a means of livelihood. He remained cheerful, unconcerned and full of humor. He had no wish to make any one with whom he happened to be uncomfortable by the recital of his misfortune. Mr. Warburton was a snob, but he was also a gentleman.

The only favor he asked of any of the great friends in whose daily company he had lived for years was a recommendation. The able man who was at that time Sultan of Sembulu took him into his service. The night before he sailed he dined for the last time at his club.

"I hear you're going away, Warburton," the old Duke of Hereford said to him.

"Yes, I'm going to Borneo."

"Good God, what are you going there for?"

"Oh, I'm broke."

"Are you? I'm sorry. Well, let us know when you come back. I hope you have a good time."

"Oh, yes. Lots of shooting, you know."

The Duke nodded and passed on. A few hours later Mr. Warburton watched the coast of England recede into the mist, and he left behind everything which to him made life worth living.

Twenty years had passed since then. He kept up a busy correspondence with various great ladies and his letters were amusing and chatty. He never lost his love for titled persons and paid careful attention to the announcements in *The Times* (which reached him six weeks after publication) of their comings and goings. He perused the column which records births, deaths, and marriages, and he was always ready with his letter of congratulation or con-

dolence. The illustrated papers told him how people looked and on his periodical visits to England, able to take up the threads as though they had never been broken, he knew all about any new person who might have appeared on the social surface. His interest in the world of fashion was as vivid as when himself had been a figure in it. It still seemed to him the only thing that mattered.

But insensibly another interest had entered into his life. The position he found himself in flattered his vanity; he was no longer the sycophant craving the smiles of the great, he was the master whose word was law. He was gratified by the guard of Dyak soldiers who presented arms as he passed. He liked to sit in judgment on his fellow men. It pleased him to compose quarrels between rival chiefs. When the head-hunters were troublesome in the old days he set out to chastise them with a thrill of pride in his own behavior. He was too vain not to be of dauntless courage, and a pretty story was told of his coolness in adventuring single-handed into a stockaded village and demanding the surrender of a bloodthirsty pirate. He became a skilful administrator. He was strict, just and honest.

And little by little he conceived a deep love for the Malays. He interested himself in their habits and customs. He was never tired of listening to their talk. He admired their virtues, and with a smile and a shrug of the shoulders condoned their vices.

"In my day," he would say, "I have been on intimate terms with some of the greatest gentlemen in England, but I have never known finer gentlemen than some well-born Malays whom I am proud to call my friends."

He liked their courtesy and their distinguished manners, their gentleness and their sudden passions. He knew by instinct exactly how to treat them. He had a genuine

tenderness for them. But he never forgot that he was an English gentleman and he had no patience with the white men who yielded to native customs. He made no surrenders. And he did not imitate so many of the white men in taking a native woman to wife, for an intrigue of this nature, however sanctified by custom, seemed to him not only shocking but undignified. A man who had been called George by Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, could hardly be expected to have any connection with a native. And when he returned to Borneo from his visits to England it was now with something like relief. His friends, like himself, were no longer young, and there was a new generation which looked upon him as a tiresome old man. It seemed to him that the England of today had lost a good deal of what he had loved in the England of his youth. But Borneo remained the same. It was home to him now. He meant to remain in the service as long as was possible, and the hope in his heart was that he would die before at last he was forced to retire. He had stated in his will that wherever he died he wished his body to be brought back to Sembulu and buried among the people he loved within sound of the softly flowing river.

But these emotions he kept hidden from the eyes of men; and no one, seeing this spruce, stout, well-set-up man, with his clean-shaven strong face and his whitening hair, would have dreamed that he cherished so profound a sentiment.

He knew how the work of the station should be done, and during the next few days he kept a suspicious eye on his assistant. He saw very soon that he was painstaking and competent. The only fault he had to find with him was that he was brusque with the natives.

"The Malays are shy and very sensitive," he said to him. "I think you will find that you will get much better

results if you take care always to be polite, patient and kindly."

Cooper gave a short, grating laugh.

"I was born in Barbadoes and I was in Africa in the war. I don't think there's much about niggers that I don't know."

"I know nothing," said Mr. Warburton acidly. "But we were not talking of them. We were talking of Malays."

"Aren't they niggers?"

"You are very ignorant," replied Mr. Warburton.

He said no more.

On the first Sunday after Cooper's arrival he asked him to dinner. He did everything ceremoniously, and though they had met on the previous day in the office and later, on the Fort verandah where they drank a gin and bitters together at six o'clock, he sent a polite note across to the bungalow by a boy. Cooper, however unwillingly, came in evening dress and Mr. Warburton, though gratified that his wish was respected, noticed with disdain that the young man's clothes were badly cut and his shirt ill-fitting. But Mr. Warburton was in a good temper that evening.

"By the way," he said to him, as he shook hands, "I've talked to my head-boy about finding you some one and he recommends his nephew. I've seen him and he seems a bright and willing lad. Would you like to see him?"

"I don't mind."

"He's waiting now."

Mr. Warburton called his boy and told him to send for his nephew. In a moment a tall, slender youth of twenty appeared. He had large dark eyes and a good profile. He was very neat in his sarong, a little white coat, and a fez, without a tassel, of plum-colored velvet. He answered to the name of Abas. Mr. Warburton looked on him with approval, and his manner insensibly softened as he spoke

to him in fluent and idiomatic Malay. He was inclined to be sarcastic with white people, but with the Malays he had a happy mixture of condescension and kindliness. He stood in the place of the Sultan. He knew perfectly how to preserve his own dignity, and at the same time put a native at his ease.

"Will he do?" said Mr. Warburton, turning to Cooper.

"Yes, I daresay he's no more of a scoundrel than any of the rest of them."

Mr. Warburton informed the boy that he was engaged and dismissed him.

"You're very lucky to get a boy like that," he told Cooper. "He belongs to a very good family. They came over from Malacca nearly a hundred years ago."

"I don't much mind if the boy who cleans my shoes and brings me a drink when I want it has blue blood in his veins or not. All I ask is that he should do what I tell him and look sharp about it."

Mr. Warburton pursed his lips, but made no reply.

They went in to dinner. It was excellent, and the wine was good. Its influence presently had its effect on them and they talked not only without acrimony, but even with friendliness. Mr. Warburton liked to do himself well, and on Sunday night he made it a habit to do himself even a little better than usual. He began to think he was unfair to Cooper. Of course he was not a gentleman, but that was not his fault, and when you got to know him it might be that he would turn out a very good fellow. His faults, perhaps, were faults of manner. And he was certainly good at his work, quick, conscientious and thorough. When they reached the dessert Mr. Warburton was feeling kindly disposed towards all mankind.

"This is your first Sunday and I'm going to give you

a very special glass of port. I've only got about two dozen of it left and I keep it for special occasions."

He gave his boy instructions and presently the bottle was brought. Mr. Warburton watched the boy open it.

"I got this port from my old friend Charles Hollington. He'd had it for forty years and I've had it for a good many. He was well known to have the best cellar in England."

"Is he a wine merchant?"

"Not exactly," smiled Mr. Warburton. "I was speaking of Lord Hollington of Castle Reagh. He's one of the richest peers in England. A very old friend of mine. I was at Eton with his brother."

This was an opportunity that Mr. Warburton could never resist and he told a little anecdote of which the only point seemed to be that he knew an earl. The port was certainly very good; he drank a glass and then a second. He lost all caution. He had not talked to a white man for months. He began to tell stories. He showed himself in the company of the great. Hearing him you would have thought that at one time ministries were formed and policies decided on his suggestion whispered into the ear of a duchess or thrown over the dinner-table to be gratefully acted on by the confidential adviser of the sovereign. The old days at Ascot, Goodwood and Cowes lived again for him. Another glass of port. There were the great house-parties in Yorkshire and in Scotland to which he went every year.

"I had a man called Foreman then, the best valet I ever had, and why do you think he gave me notice? You know in the Housekeeper's Room the ladies' maids and the gentlemen's gentlemen sit according to the precedence of their masters. He told me he was sick of going to party after party at which I was the only commoner. It meant

that he always had to sit at the bottom of the table and all the best bits were taken before a dish reached him. I told the story to the old Duke of Hereford and he roared. 'By God, sir,' he said, 'if I were King of England I'd make you a viscount just to give your man a chance.' 'Take him yourself, Duke,' I said. 'He's the best valet I've ever had.' 'Well, Warburton,' he said, 'if he's good enough for you he's good enough for me. Send him along.' "

Then there was Monte Carlo where Mr. Warburton and the Grand Duke Fyodor, playing in partnership, had broken the bank one evening; and there was Marienbad. At Marienbad Mr. Warburton had played baccarat with Edward VII.

"He was only Prince of Wales then, of course. I remember him saying to me, 'George, if you draw on a five you'll lose your shirt.' He was right; I don't think he ever said a truer word in his life. He was a wonderful man. I always said he was the greatest diplomatist in Europe. But I was a young fool in those days, I hadn't the sense to take his advice. If I had, if I'd never drawn on a five, I daresay I shouldn't be here today."

Cooper was watching him. His brown eyes, deep in their sockets, were hard and supercilious, and on his lips was a mocking smile. He had heard a good deal about Mr. Warburton in Kuala Solor. Not a bad sort, and he ran his district like clockwork, they said, but by heaven, what a snob! They laughed at him good-naturedly, for it was impossible to dislike a man who was so generous and so kindly, and Cooper had already heard the story of the Prince of Wales and the game of baccarat. But Cooper listened without indulgence. From the beginning he had resented the Resident's manner. He was very sensitive and he writhed under Mr. Warburton's polite sarcasms. Mr.

Warburton had a knack of receiving a remark of which he disapproved with a devastating silence. Cooper had lived little in England and he had a peculiar dislike of the English. He resented especially the public-school boy since he always feared that he was going to patronize him. He was so much afraid of others putting on airs with him that, in order as it were to get in first, he put on such airs as to make every one think him insufferably conceited.

"Well, at all events the war has done one good thing for us," he said at last. "It's smashed up the power of the aristocracy. The Boer War started it, and 1914 put the lid on."

"The great families of England are doomed," said Mr. Warburton with the complacent melancholy of an *émigré* who remembered the court of Louis XV. "They cannot afford any longer to live in their splendid palaces and their princely hospitality will soon be nothing but a memory."

"And a damned good job too in my opinion."

"My poor Cooper, what can you know of the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome?"

Mr. Warburton made an ample gesture. His eyes for an instant grew dreamy with a vision of the past.

"Well, believe me, we're fed up with all that rot. What we want is a business government by business men. I was born in a Crown Colony and I've lived practically all my life in the colonies. I don't give a row of pins for a lord. What's wrong with England is snobbishness. And if there's anything that gets my goat it's a snob."

A snob! Mr. Warburton's face grew purple and his eyes blazed with anger. That was a word that had pursued him all his life. The great ladies whose society he had enjoyed in his youth were not inclined to look upon his appreciation of themselves as unworthy, but even great

ladies are sometimes out of temper and more than once Mr. Warburton had had the dreadful word flung in his teeth. He knew, he could not help knowing, that there were odious people who called him a snob. How unfair it was! Why, there was no vice he found so detestable as snobbishness. After all, he liked to mix with people of his own class, he was only at home in their company, and how in heaven's name could any one say that was snobbish? Birds of a feather.

"I quite agree with you," he answered. "A snob is a man who admires or despises another because he is of a higher social rank than his own. It is the most vulgar failing of our English middle class."

He saw a flicker of amusement in Cooper's eyes. Cooper put up his hand to hide the broad smile that rose to his lips, and so made it more noticeable. Mr. Warburton's hands trembled a little.

Probably Cooper never knew how greatly he had offended his chief. A sensitive man himself, he was strangely insensitive to the feelings of others.

Their work forced them to see one another for a few minutes now and then during the day, and they met at six to have a drink on Mr. Warburton's verandah. This was an old-established custom of the country which Mr. Warburton would not for the world have broken. But they ate their meals separately, Cooper in his bungalow and Mr. Warburton at the Fort. After the office work was over they walked till dusk fell, but they walked apart. There were but few paths in this country, where the jungle pressed close upon the plantations of the village, and when Mr. Warburton caught sight of his assistant passing along with his loose stride, he would make a circuit in order to avoid him. Cooper, with his bad manners, his conceit in his own judgment and his intolerance, had al-

ready got on his nerves; but it was not till Cooper had been on the station for a couple of months that an incident happened which turned the Resident's dislike into bitter hatred.

Mr. Warburton was obliged to go up-country on a tour of inspection, and he left the station in Cooper's charge with more confidence, since he had definitely come to the conclusion that he was a capable fellow. The only thing he did not like was that he had no indulgence. He was honest, just and painstaking, but he had no sympathy for the natives. It bitterly amused Mr. Warburton to observe that this man, who looked upon himself as every man's equal, should look upon so many men as his own inferiors. He was hard, he had no patience with the native mind, and he was a bully. Mr. Warburton very quickly realized that the Malays disliked and feared him. He was not altogether displeased. He would not have liked it very much if his assistant had enjoyed a popularity which might rival his own. Mr. Warburton made his elaborate preparations, set out on his expedition, and in three weeks returned. Meanwhile the mail had arrived. The first thing that struck his eyes when he entered his sitting-room was a great pile of open newspapers. Cooper had met him, and they went into the room together. Mr. Warburton turned to one of the servants who had been left behind and sternly asked him what was the meaning of those open papers. Cooper hastened to explain.

"I wanted to read all about the Wolverhampton murder and so I borrowed your *Times*. I brought them back again. I knew you wouldn't mind."

Mr. Warburton turned on him, white with anger.

"But I do mind. I mind very much."

"I'm sorry," said Cooper, with composure. "The fact is, I simply couldn't wait till you came back."

"I wonder you didn't open my letters as well."

Cooper, unmoved, smiled at his chief's exasperation.

"Oh, that's not quite the same thing. After all, I couldn't imagine you'd mind my looking at your newspapers. There's nothing private in them."

"I very much object to any one reading my paper before me." He went up to the pile. There were nearly thirty numbers there. "I think it extremely impertinent of you. They're all mixed up."

"We can easily put them in order," said Cooper, joining him at the table.

"Don't touch them," cried Mr. Warburton.

"I say, it's childish to make a scene about a little thing like that."

"How dare you speak to me like that?"

"Oh, go to hell," said Cooper, and he flung out of the room.

Mr. Warburton, trembling with passion, was left contemplating his papers. His greatest pleasure in life had been destroyed by those callous, brutal hands. Most people living in out-of-the-way places when the mail comes tear open impatiently their papers and taking the last ones first glance at the latest news from home. Not so Mr. Warburton. His newsagent had instructions to write on the outside of the wrapper the date of each paper he despatched and when the great bundle arrived Mr. Warburton looked at these dates and with his blue pencil numbered them. His head-boy's orders were to place one on the table every morning in the verandah with the early cup of tea, and it was Mr. Warburton's especial delight to break the wrapper as he sipped his tea, and read the morning paper. It gave him the illusion of living at home. Every Monday morning he read the Monday *Times* of

six weeks back and so went through the week. On Sunday he read *The Observer*. Like his habit of dressing for dinner it was a tie to civilization. And it was his pride that no matter how exciting the news was he had never yielded to the temptation of opening a paper before its allotted time. During the war the suspense sometimes had been intolerable, and when he read one day that a push was begun he had undergone agonies of suspense which he might have saved himself by the simple expedient of opening a later paper which lay waiting for him on a shelf. It had been the severest trial to which he had ever exposed himself, but he victoriously surmounted it. And that clumsy fool had broken open those neat tight packages because he wanted to know whether some horrid woman had murdered her odious husband.

Mr. Warburton sent for his boy and told him to bring wrappers. He folded up the papers as neatly as he could, placed a wrapper round each and numbered it. But it was a melancholy task.

"I shall never forgive him," he said. "Never."

Of course his boy had been with him on his expedition; he never traveled without him, for his boy knew exactly how he liked things, and Mr. Warburton was not the kind of jungle traveler who was prepared to dispense with his comforts; but in the interval since their arrival he had been gossiping in the servants' quarters. He had learnt that Cooper had had trouble with his boys. All but the youth Abas had left him. Abas had desired to go too, but his uncle had placed him there on the instructions of the Resident, and he was afraid to leave without his uncle's permission.

"I told him he had done well, Tuan," said the boy. "But he is unhappy. He says it is not a good house and

he wishes to know if he may go as the others have gone."

"No, he must stay. The tuan must have servants. Have those who went been replaced?"

"No, Tuan, no one will go."

Mr. Warburton frowned. Cooper was an insolent fool, but he had an official position and must be suitably provided with servants. It was not seemly that his house should be improperly conducted.

"Where are the boys who ran away?"

"They are in the kampong, Tuan."

"Go and see them tonight and tell them that I expect them to be back in Tuan Cooper's house at dawn tomorrow."

"They say they will not go, Tuan."

"On my order?"

The boy had been with Mr. Warburton for fifteen years, and he knew every intonation of his master's voice. He was not afraid of him, they had gone through too much together, once in the jungle the Resident had saved his life and once, upset in some rapids, but for him the Resident would have been drowned; but he knew when the Resident must be obeyed without question.

"I will go to the kampong," he said.

Mr. Warburton expected that his subordinate would take the first opportunity to apologize for his rudeness, but Cooper had the ill-bred man's inability to express regret; and when they met next morning in the office he ignored the incident. Since Mr. Warburton had been away for three weeks it was necessary for them to have a somewhat prolonged interview. At the end of it Mr. Warburton dismissed him.

"I don't think there's anything else, thank you." Cooper turned to go, but Mr. Warburton stopped him. "I understand you've been having some trouble with your boys."

Cooper gave a harsh laugh.

"They tried to blackmail me. They had the damned cheek to run away, all except that incompetent fellow Abas—he knew when he was well off—but I just sat tight. They've all come to heel again."

"What do you mean by that?"

"This morning they were all back on their jobs, the Chinese cook and all. There they were, as cool as cucumbers; you would have thought they owned the place. I suppose they'd come to the conclusion that I wasn't such a fool as I looked."

"By no means. They came back on my express order."

Cooper flushed slightly.

"I should be obliged if you wouldn't interfere with my private concerns."

"They're not your private concerns. When your servants run away it makes you ridiculous. You are perfectly free to make a fool of yourself, but I cannot allow you to be made a fool of. It is unseemly that your house should not be properly staffed. As soon as I heard that your boys had left you, I had them told to be back in their places at dawn. That'll do."

Mr. Warburton nodded to signify that the interview was at an end. Cooper took no notice.

"Shall I tell you what I did? I called them and gave the whole bally lot the sack. I gave them ten minutes to get out of the compound."

Mr. Warburton shrugged his shoulders.

"What makes you think you can get others?"

"I've told my own clerk to see about it."

Mr. Warburton reflected for a moment.

"I think you behaved very foolishly. You will do well to remember in future that good masters make good servants."

"Is there anything else you want to teach me?"

"I should like to teach you manners, but it would be an arduous task, and I have not the time to waste. I will see that you get boys."

"Please don't put yourself to any trouble on my account. I'm quite capable of getting them for myself."

Mr. Warburton smiled acidly. He had an inkling that Cooper disliked him as much as he disliked Cooper, and he knew that nothing is more galling than to be forced to accept the favors of a man you detest.

"Allow me to tell you that you have no more chance of getting Malay or Chinese servants here now than you have of getting an English butler or a French chef. No one will come to you except on an order from me. Would you like me to give it?"

"No."

"As you please. Good morning."

Mr. Warburton watched the development of the situation with acrid humor. Cooper's clerk was unable to persuade Malay, Dyak or Chinese to enter the house of such a master. Abas, the boy who remained faithful to him, knew how to cook only native food, and Cooper, a coarse feeder, found his gorge rise against the everlasting rice. There was no water-carrier, and in that great heat he needed several baths a day. He cursed Abas, but Abas opposed him with sullen resistance and would not do more than he chose. It was galling to know that the lad stayed with him only because the Resident insisted. This went on for a fortnight and then, one morning, he found in his house the very servants whom he had previously dismissed. He fell into a violent rage, but he had learnt a little sense, and this time, without a word, he let them stay. He swallowed his humiliation, but the impatient contempt he had felt for Mr. Warburton's idiosyncrasies changed into a

sullen hatred; the Resident with this malicious stroke had made him the laughing-stock of all the natives.

The two men now held no communication with one another. They broke the time-honored custom of sharing, notwithstanding personal dislike, a drink at six o'clock with any white man who happened to be at the station. Each lived in his own house as though the other did not exist. Now that Cooper had fallen into the work, it was necessary for them to have little to do with one another in the office. Mr. Warburton used his orderly to send any message he had to give his assistant, and his instructions he sent by formal letter. They saw one another constantly, that was inevitable, but did not exchange half a dozen words in a week. The fact that they could not avoid catching sight of one another got on their nerves. They brooded over their antagonism and Mr. Warburton, taking his daily walk, could think of nothing but how much he detested his assistant.

And the dreadful thing was that in all probability they would remain thus, facing each other in deadly enmity, till Mr. Warburton went on leave. It might be three years. He had no reason to send in a complaint to headquarters: Cooper did his work very well, and at that time men were hard to get. True, vague complaints reached him and hints that the natives found Cooper harsh. There was certainly a feeling of dissatisfaction among them. But when Mr. Warburton looked into specific cases, all he could say was that Cooper had shown severity where mildness would not have been misplaced and had been unfeeling when himself would have been sympathetic. He had done nothing for which he could be taken to task. But Mr. Warburton watched him. Hatred will often make a man clear-sighted, and he had a suspicion that Cooper was using the natives without consideration, yet keeping within the law,

because he felt that thus he could exasperate his chief. One day perhaps he would go too far. None knew better than Mr. Warburton how irritable the incessant heat could make a man and how difficult it was to keep one's self-control after a sleepless night. He smiled softly to himself. Sooner or later Cooper would deliver himself into his hand.

When at last the opportunity came Mr. Warburton laughed aloud. Cooper had charge of the prisoners; they made roads, built sheds, rowed when it was necessary to send the prahu up- or down-stream, kept the town clean and otherwise usefully employed themselves. If well-behaved they even on occasion served as house-boys. Cooper kept them hard at it. He liked to see them work. He took pleasure in devising tasks for them; and seeing quickly enough that they were being made to do useless things the prisoners worked badly. He punished them by lengthening their hours. This was contrary to the regulations, and as soon as it was brought to the attention of Mr. Warburton, without referring the matter back to his subordinate, he gave instructions that the old hours should be kept; Cooper, going out for his walk, was astounded to see the prisoners strolling back to the jail; he had given instructions that they were not to knock off till dusk. When he asked the warder in charge why they had left off work he was told that it was the Resident's bidding.

White with rage he strode to the Fort. Mr. Warburton, in his spotless white ducks and his neat topee, with a walking-stick in his hand, followed by his dogs, was on the point of starting out on his afternoon stroll. He had watched Cooper go and knew that he had taken the road by the river. Cooper jumped up the steps and went straight up to the Resident.

"I want to know what the hell you mean by countermanding my order that the prisoners were to work till six," he burst out, beside himself with fury.

Mr. Warburton opened his cold blue eyes very wide and assumed an expression of great surprise.

"Are you out of your mind? Are you so ignorant that you do not know that that is not the way to speak to your official superior?"

"Oh, go to hell. The prisoners are my pidgin and you've got no right to interfere. You mind your business and I'll mind mine. I want to know what the devil you mean by making a damned fool of me. Every one in the place will know that you've countermanded my order."

Mr. Warburton kept very cool.

"You had no power to give the order you did. I countermanded it because it was harsh and tyrannical. Believe me, I have not made half such a damned fool of you as you have made of yourself."

"You disliked me from the first moment I came here. You've done everything you could to make the place impossible for me because I wouldn't lick your boots for you. You got your knife into me because I wouldn't flatter you."

Cooper, spluttering with rage, was nearing dangerous ground, and Mr. Warburton's eyes grew on a sudden colder and more piercing.

"You are wrong. I thought you were a cad, but I was perfectly satisfied with the way you did your work."

"You snob. You damned snob. You thought me a cad because I hadn't been to Eton. Oh, they told me in K.S. what to expect. Why, don't you know that you're the laughing-stock of the whole country? I could hardly help bursting into a roar of laughter when you told your celebrated story about the Prince of Wales. My God, how

they shouted at the club when they told it. By God, I'd rather be the cad I am than the snob you are."

He got Mr. Warburton on the raw.

"If you don't get out of my house this minute I shall knock you down," he cried.

The other came a little closer to him and put his face in his.

"Touch me, touch me," he said. "By God, I'd like to see you hit me. Do you want me to say it again? Snob. Snob."

Cooper was three inches taller than Mr. Warburton, a strong, muscular young man. Mr. Warburton was fat and fifty-four. His clenched fist shot out. Cooper caught him by the arm and pushed him back.

"Don't be a damned fool. Remember I'm not a gentleman. I know how to use my hands."

He gave a sort of hoot, and, grinning all over his pale, sharp face, jumped down the verandah steps. Mr. Warburton, his heart in his anger pounding against his ribs, sank exhausted into a chair. His body tingled as though he had prickly heat. For one horrible moment he thought he was going to cry. But suddenly he was conscious that his head-boy was on the verandah and instinctively regained control of himself. The boy came forward and filled him a glass of whisky and soda. Without a word Mr. Warburton took it and drank it to the dregs.

"What do you want to say to me?" asked Mr. Warburton, trying to force a smile on to his strained lips.

"Tuan, the assistant tuan is a bad man. Abas wishes again to leave him."

"Let him wait a little. I shall write to Kuala Solor and ask that Tuan Cooper should go elsewhere."

"Tuan Cooper is not good with the Malays."

"Leave me."

The boy silently withdrew. Mr. Warburton was left alone with his thoughts. He saw the club at Kuala Solor, the men sitting round the table in the window in their flannels, when the night had driven them in from golf and tennis, drinking whiskies and gin pahits and laughing when they told the celebrated story of the Prince of Wales and himself at Marienbad. He was hot with shame and misery. A snob! They all thought him a snob. And he had always thought them very good fellows, he had always been gentleman enough to let it make no difference to him that they were of very second-rate position. He hated them now. But his hatred for them was nothing compared with his hatred for Cooper. And if it had come to blows Cooper could have thrashed him. Tears of mortification ran down his red, fat face. He sat there for a couple of hours smoking cigarette after cigarette, and he wished he were dead.

At last the boy came back and asked him if he would dress for dinner. Of course! He always dressed for dinner. He rose wearily from his chair and put on his stiff shirt and the high collar. He sat down at the prettily decorated table and was waited on as usual by the two boys while two others waved their great fans. Over there in the bungalow, two hundred yards away, Cooper was eating a filthy meal clad only in a sarong and a baju. His feet were bare and while he ate he probably read a detective story. After dinner Mr. Warburton sat down to write a letter. The Sultan was away, but he wrote, privately and confidentially, to his representative. Cooper did his work very well, he said, but the fact was that he couldn't get on with him. They were getting dreadfully on each other's nerves and he would look upon it as a very great favor if Cooper could be transferred to another post.

He despatched the letter next morning by special mes-

senger. The answer came a fortnight later with the month's mail. It was a private note and ran as follows:

"My dear Warburton:

"I do not want to answer your letter officially and so I am writing you a few lines myself. Of course if you insist I will put the matter up to the Sultan, but I think you would be much wiser to drop it. I know Cooper is a rough diamond, but he is capable, and he had a pretty thin time in the war, and I think he should be given every chance. I think you are a little too much inclined to attach importance to a man's social position. You must remember that times have changed. Of course it's a very good thing for a man to be a gentleman, but it's better that he should be competent and hard-working. I think if you'll exercise a little tolerance you'll get on very well with Cooper.

"Yours very sincerely,

"Richard Temple."

The letter dropped from Mr. Warburton's hand. It was easy to read between the lines. Dick Temple, whom he had known for twenty years, Dick Temple, who came from quite a good county family, thought him a snob and for that reason had no patience with his request. Mr. Warburton felt on a sudden discouraged with life. The world of which he was a part had passed away, and the future belonged to a meaner generation. Cooper represented it and Cooper he hated with all his heart. He stretched out his hand to fill his glass and at the gesture his head-boy stepped forward.

"I didn't know you were there."

The boy picked up the official letter. Ah, that was why he was waiting.

"Does Tuan Cooper go, Tuan?"

"No."

"There will be a misfortune."

For a moment the words conveyed nothing to his lassitude. But only for a moment. He sat up in his chair and looked at the boy. He was all attention.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Tuan Cooper is not behaving rightly with Abas."

Mr. Warburton shrugged his shoulders. How should a man like Cooper know how to treat servants? Mr. Warburton knew the type: he would be grossly familiar with them at one moment and rude and inconsiderate the next.

"Let Abas go back to his family."

"Tuan Cooper holds back his wages so that he may not run away. He has paid him nothing for three months. I tell him to be patient. But he is angry, he will not listen to reason. If the tuan continues to use him ill there will be a misfortune."

"You were right to tell me."

The fool! Did he know so little of the Malays as to think he could safely injure them? It would serve him damned well right if he got a kris in his back. A kris. Mr. Warburton's heart seemed on a sudden to miss a beat. He had only to let things take their course and one fine day he would be rid of Cooper. He smiled faintly as the phrase, a masterly inactivity, crossed his mind. And now his heart beat a little quicker, for he saw the man he hated lying on his face in a pathway of the jungle with a knife in his back. A fit end for the cad and the bully. Mr. Warburton sighed. It was his duty to warn him and of course he must do it. He wrote a brief and formal note to Cooper asking him to come to the Fort at once.

In ten minutes Cooper stood before him. They had not spoken to one another since the day when Mr. Warbur-

ton had nearly struck him. He did not now ask him to sit down.

"Did you wish to see me?" Cooper asked.

He was untidy and none too clean. His face and hands were covered with little red blotches where mosquitoes had bitten him and he had scratched himself till the blood came. His long, thin face bore a sullen look.

"I understand that you are again having trouble with your servants. Abas, my head-boy's nephew, complains that you have held back his wages for three months. I consider it a most arbitrary proceeding. The lad wishes to leave you, and I certainly do not blame him. I must insist on your paying what is due to him."

"I don't choose that he should leave me. I am holding back his wages as a pledge of his good behavior."

"You do not know the Malay character. The Malays are very sensitive to injury and ridicule. They are passionate and revengeful. It is my duty to warn you that if you drive this boy beyond a certain point you run a great risk."

Cooper gave a contemptuous chuckle.

"What do you think he'll do?"

"I think he'll kill you."

"Why should you mind?"

"Oh, I wouldn't," replied Mr. Warburton, with a faint laugh. "I should bear it with the utmost fortitude. But I feel the official obligation to give you a proper warning."

"Do you think I'm afraid of a damned nigger?"

"It's a matter of entire indifference to me."

"Well, let me tell you this, I know how to take care of myself; that boy Abas is a dirty, thieving rascal, and if he tries any monkey tricks on me, by God, I'll wring his bloody neck."

"That was all I wished to say to you," said Mr. Warburton. "Good evening."

Mr. Warburton gave him a little nod of dismissal. Cooper flushed, did not for a moment know what to say or do, turned on his heel and stumbled out of the room. Mr. Warburton watched him go with an icy smile on his lips. He had done his duty. But what would he have thought had he known that when Cooper got back to his bungalow, so silent and cheerless, he threw himself down on his bed and in his bitter loneliness on a sudden lost all control of himself? Painful sobs tore his chest and heavy tears rolled down his thin cheeks.

After this Mr. Warburton seldom saw Cooper, and never spoke to him. He read his *Times* every morning, did his work at the office, took his exercise, dressed for dinner, dined and sat by the river smoking his cheroot. If by chance he ran across Cooper he cut him dead. Each, though never for a moment unconscious of the propinquity, acted as though the other did not exist. Time did nothing to assuage their animosity. They watched one another's actions and each knew what the other did. Though Mr. Warburton had been a keen shot in his youth, with age he had acquired a distaste for killing the wild things of the jungle, but on Sundays and holidays Cooper went out with his gun: if he got something it was a triumph over Mr. Warburton; if not, Mr. Warburton shrugged his shoulders and chuckled. These counter-jumpers trying to be sportsmen! Christmas was a bad time for both of them: they ate their dinners alone, each in his own quarters, and they got deliberately drunk. They were the only white men within two hundred miles and they lived within shouting distance of each other. At the beginning of the year Cooper went down with fever, and

when Mr. Warburton caught sight of him again he was surprised to see how thin he had grown. He looked ill and worn. The solitude, so much more unnatural because it was due to no necessity, was getting on his nerves. It was getting on Mr. Warburton's too, and often he could not sleep at night. He lay awake brooding. Cooper was drinking heavily and surely the breaking point was near; but in his dealings with the natives he took care to do nothing that might expose him to his chief's rebuke. They fought a grim and silent battle with one another. It was a test of endurance. The months passed, and neither gave sign of weakening. They were like men dwelling in regions of eternal night, and their souls were oppressed with the knowledge that never would the day dawn for them. It looked as though their lives would continue for ever in this dull and hideous monotony of hatred.

And when at last the inevitable happened it came upon Mr. Warburton with all the shock of the unexpected. Cooper accused the boy Abas of stealing some of his clothes, and when the boy denied the theft took him by the scruff of the neck and kicked him down the steps of the bungalow. The boy demanded his wages, and Cooper flung at his head every word of abuse he knew. If he saw him in the compound in an hour he would hand him over to the police. Next morning the boy waylaid him outside the Fort when he was walking over to his office, and again demanded his wages. Cooper struck him in the face with his clenched fist. The boy fell to the ground and got up with blood streaming from his nose.

Cooper walked on and set about his work. But he could not attend to it. The blow had calmed his irritation, and he knew that he had gone too far. He was worried. He felt ill, miserable and discouraged. In the adjoining office sat Mr. Warburton, and his impulse was to go and tell

him what he had done; he made a movement in his chair, but he knew with what icy scorn he would listen to the story. He could see his patronizing smile. For a moment he had an uneasy fear of what Abas might do. Warburton had warned him all right. He sighed. What a fool he had been! But he shrugged his shoulders impatiently. He did not care; a fat lot he had to live for. It was all Warburton's fault; if he hadn't put his back up nothing like this would have happened. Warburton had made life a hell for him from the start. The snob. But they were all like that: it was because he was a Colonial. It was a damned shame that he had never got his commission in the war; he was as good as any one else. They were a lot of dirty snobs. He was damned if he was going to knuckle under now. Of course Warburton would hear of what had happened; the old devil knew everything. He wasn't afraid. He wasn't afraid of any Malay in Borneo, and Warburton could go to blazes.

He was right in thinking that Mr. Warburton would know what had happened. His head-boy told him when he went in to tiffin.

"Where is your nephew now?"

"I do not know, Tuan. He has gone."

Mr. Warburton remained silent. After luncheon as a rule he slept a little, but today he found himself very wide awake. His eyes involuntarily sought the bungalow where Cooper was now resting.

The idiot! Hesitation for a little was in Mr. Warburton's mind. Did the man know in what peril he was? He supposed he ought to send for him. But each time he had tried to reason with Cooper, Cooper had insulted him. Anger, furious anger welled up suddenly in Mr. Warburton's heart, so that the veins on his temples stood out and he clenched his fists. The cad had had his warning.

Now let him take what was coming to him. It was no business of his and if anything happened it was not his fault. But perhaps they would wish in Kuala Solor that they had taken his advice and transferred Cooper to another station.

He was strangely restless that night. After dinner he walked up and down the verandah. When the boy went away to his own quarters, Mr. Warburton asked him whether anything had been seen of Abas.

"No, Tuan, I think maybe he has gone to the village of his mother's brother."

Mr. Warburton gave him a sharp glance, but the boy was looking down and their eyes did not meet. Mr. Warburton went down to the river and sat in his arbor. But peace was denied him. The river flowed ominously silent. It was like a great serpent gliding with sluggish movement towards the sea. And the trees of the jungle over the water were heavy with a breathless menace. No bird sang. No breeze ruffled the leaves of the cassias. All around him it seemed as though something waited.

He walked across the garden to the road. He had Cooper's bungalow in full view from there. There was a light in his sitting-room and across the road floated the sound of rag-time. Cooper was playing his gramophone. Mr. Warburton shuddered; he had never got over his instinctive dislike of that instrument. But for that he would have gone over and spoken to Cooper. He turned and went back to his own house. He read late into the night, and at last he slept. But he did not sleep very long, he had terrible dreams, and he seemed to be awakened by a cry. Of course that was a dream too, for no cry—from the bungalow for instance—could be heard in his room. He lay awake till dawn. Then he heard hurried steps and the sound of

voices, his head-boy burst suddenly into the room without his fez, and Mr. Warburton's heart stood still.

"Tuan, Tuan."

Mr. Warburton jumped out of bed.

"I'll come at once."

He put on his slippers, and in his sarong and pyjama-jacket walked across his compound and into Cooper's. Cooper was lying in bed, with his mouth open, and a kris sticking in his heart. He had been killed in his sleep. Mr. Warburton started, but not because he had not expected to see just such a sight, he started because he felt in himself a sudden glow of exultation. A great burden had been lifted from his shoulders.

Cooper was quite cold. Mr. Warburton took the kris out of the wound, it had been thrust in with such force that he had to use an effort to get it out, and looked at it. He recognized it. It was a kris that a dealer had offered him some weeks before and which he knew Cooper had bought.

"Where is Abas?" he asked sternly.

"Abas is at the village of his mother's brother."

The sergeant of the native police was standing at the foot of the bed.

"Take two men and go to the village and arrest him."

Mr. Warburton did what was immediately necessary. With set face he gave orders. His words were short and peremptory. Then he went back to the Fort. He shaved and had his bath, dressed and went into the dining-room. By the side of his plate *The Times* in its wrapper lay waiting for him. He helped himself to some fruit. The head-boy poured out his tea while the second handed him a dish of eggs. Mr. Warburton ate with a good appetite. The head-boy waited.

"What is it?" asked Mr. Warburton.

"Tuan, Abas, my nephew, was in the house of his mother's brother all night. It can be proved. His uncle will swear that he did not leave the kampong."

Mr. Warburton turned upon him with a frown.

"Tuan Cooper was killed by Abas. You know it as well as I know it. Justice must be done."

"Tuan, you would not hang him?"

Mr. Warburton hesitated an instant, and though his voice remained set and stern a change came into his eyes. It was a flicker which the Malay was quick to notice and across his own eyes flashed an answering look of understanding.

"The provocation was very great. Abas will be sentenced to a term of imprisonment." There was a pause while Mr. Warburton helped himself to marmalade. "When he has served a part of his sentence in prison I will take him into this house as a boy. You can train him in his duties. I have no doubt that in the house of Tuan Cooper he got into bad habits."

"Shall Abas give himself up, Tuan?"

"It would be wise of him."

The boy withdrew. Mr. Warburton took his *Times* and neatly slit the wrapper. He loved to unfold the heavy, rustling pages. The morning, so fresh and cool, was delicious and for a moment his eyes wandered out over his garden with a friendly glance. A great weight had been lifted from his mind. He turned to the columns in which were announced the births, deaths, and marriages. That was what he always looked at first. A name he knew caught his attention. Lady Ormskirk had had a son at last. By George, how pleased the old dowager must be! He would write her a note of congratulation by the next mail.

Abas would make a very good house-boy.

That fool Cooper!

THE BACKGROUND[1]

by "Saki" (H. H. Munro)

H. H. Munro was a young English writer who was killed in the World War. His stories are of a humorously satiric nature and since his death have received a greater public recognition than they did in his own day. Political and social ideas are the subject of his work, and the sophistication of his style is something unusual in contemporary literature. The story included in this collection is a well-nigh perfect example of "form" in short fiction. His books include *The Chronicles of Clovis, The Unbearable Bassington, Beasts and Super-beasts,* and *The Square Egg.*

"That woman's art-jargon tires me," said Clovis to his journalist friend. "She's so fond of talking of certain pictures as 'growing on one,' as though they were a sort of fungus."

"That reminds me," said the journalist, "of the story of Henri Deplis. Have I ever told it you?"

Clovis shook his head.

"Henri Deplis was by birth a native of the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg. On maturer reflection he became a commercial traveller. His business activities frequently took him beyond the limits of the Grand Duchy, and he was stopping in a small town of Northern Italy when news reached him from home that a legacy from a distant and deceased relative had fallen to his share.

"It was not a large legacy, even from the modest standpoint of Henri Deplis, but it impelled him towards some

[1] Reprinted from *The Chronicles of Clovis* by "Saki" (H. H. Munro), published by the Viking Press. By permission of Brandt & Brandt, New York.

seemingly harmless extravagances. In particular it led him to patronize local art as represented by the tattoo-needles of Signor Andreas Pincini. Signor Pincini was, perhaps, the most brilliant master of tattoo craft that Italy had ever known, but his circumstances were decidedly impoverished, and for the sum of six hundred francs he gladly undertook to cover his client's back, from the collar-bone down to the waist-line, with a glowing representation of the Fall of Icarus. The design, when finally developed, was a slight disappointment to Monsieur Deplis, who had suspected Icarus of being a fortress taken by Wallenstein in the Thirty Years' War, but he was more than satisfied with the execution of the work, which was acclaimed by all who had the privilege of seeing it as Pincini's masterpiece.

"It was his greatest effort, and his last. Without even waiting to be paid, the illustrious craftsman departed this life, and was buried under an ornate tombstone, whose winged cherubs would have afforded singularly little scope for the exercise of his favorite art. There remained, however, the widow Pincini, to whom the six hundred francs were due. And thereupon arose the great crisis in the life of Henri Deplis, traveler of commerce. The legacy, under the stress of numerous little calls on its substance, had dwindled to very insignificant proportions, and when a pressing wine bill and sundry other current accounts had been paid, there remained little more than 430 francs to offer to the widow. The lady was properly indignant, not wholly, as she volubly explained, on account of the suggested writing-off of 170 francs, but also at the attempt to depreciate the value of her late husband's acknowledged masterpiece. In a week's time Deplis was obliged to reduce his offer to 405 francs, which circumstance fanned the widow's indignation into a fury. She canceled the sale of

the work of art, and a few days later Deplis learned with a sense of consternation that she had presented it to the municipality of Bergamo, which had gratefully accepted it. He left the neighborhood as unobtrusively as possible, and was genuinely relieved when his business commands took him to Rome, where he hoped his identity and that of the famous picture might be lost sight of.

"But he bore on his back the burden of the dead man's genius. On presenting himself one day in the steaming corridor of a vapor bath, he was at once hustled back into his clothes by the proprietor, who was a North Italian, and who emphatically refused to allow the celebrated Fall of Icarus to be publicly on view without the permission of the municipality of Bergamo. Public interest and official vigilance increased as the matter became more widely known, and Deplis was unable to take a simple dip in the sea or river on the hottest afternoon unless clothed up to the collar-bone in a substantial bathing garment. Later on the authorities of Bergamo conceived the idea that salt water might be injurious to the masterpiece, and a perpetual injunction was obtained which debarred the muchly harassed commercial traveler from sea bathing under any circumstances. Altogether, he was fervently thankful when his firm of employers found him a new range of activities in the neighborhood of Bordeaux. His thankfulness, however, ceased abruptly at the Franco-Italian frontier. An imposing array of official force barred his departure, and he was sternly reminded of the stringent law which forbids the exportation of Italian works of art.

"A diplomatic parley ensued between the Luxemburgian and Italian Governments, and at one time the European situation became overcast with the possibilities of trouble. But the Italian Government stood firm; it

declined to concern itself in the least with the fortunes or even the existence of Henri Deplis, commercial traveler, but was immovable in its decision that the Fall of Icarus (by the late Pincini, Andreas), at present the property of the municipality of Bergamo, should not leave the country.

"The excitement died down in time, but the unfortunate Deplis, who was of a constitutionally retiring disposition, found himself a few months later once more the storm-center of a furious controversy. A certain German art expert, who had obtained from the municipality of Bergamo permission to inspect the famous masterpiece, declared it to be a spurious Pincini, probably the work of some pupil whom he had employed in his declining years. The evidence of Deplis on the subject was obviously worthless, as he had been under the influence of the customary narcotics during the long process of pricking in the design. The editor of an Italian art journal refuted the contentions of the German expert and undertook to prove that his private life did not conform to any modern standard of decency. The whole of Italy and Germany were drawn into the dispute, and the rest of Europe was soon involved in the quarrel. There were stormy scenes in the Spanish Parliament, and the University of Copenhagen bestowed a gold medal on the German expert (afterwards sending a commission to examine his proofs on the spot), while two Polish schoolboys in Paris committed suicide to show what *they* thought of the matter.

"Meanwhile, the unhappy human background fared no better than before, and it was not surprising that he drifted into the ranks of Italian anarchists. Four times at least he was escorted to the frontier as a dangerous and undesirable foreigner, but he was always brought back as the Fall of Icarus (attributed to Pincini, Andreas, early

Twentieth Century). And then one day, at an anarchist congress at Genoa, a fellow-worker, in the heat of debate, broke a phial full of corrosive liquid over his back. The red shirt that he was wearing mitigated the effects, but the Icarus was ruined beyond recognition. His assailant was severely reprimanded for assaulting a fellow-anarchist and received seven years' imprisonment for defacing a national art treasure. As soon as he was able to leave the hospital Henri Deplis was put across the frontier as an undesirable alien.

"In the quieter streets of Paris, especially in the neighborhood of the Ministry of Fine Arts, you may sometimes meet a depressed, anxious-looking man, who, if you pass him the time of day, will answer you with a slight Luxemburgian accent. He nurses the illusion that he is one of the lost arms of the Venus de Milo, and hopes that the French Government may be persuaded to buy him. On all other subjects I believe he is tolerably sane."

SOOTH[1]

by Wilbur Daniel Steele

Wilbur Daniel Steele was born in North Carolina in 1886. He graduated from the University of Denver and later studied art in Boston, New York, and Paris. He now lives at Nantucket. He is a consistently excellent short-story writer, having won more prizes and awards for his work than any other living author. In 1921 he received the O. Henry Memorial Award for maintaining a higher level of merit in the short story for three years than any other American fictionist. His stories are remarkable for their atmospheric effects of mood and strangeness. The story included here is notable for its blend of the formless "stream of consciousness" technique with the older "plot" method of story structure. Among his books are *Land's End, The Man Who Saw Through Heaven, Isles of the Blest,* and *Meat.*

There was no road to follow, not even a wheel track; the rise and fall of the ground, matted inches deep in wild cranberry, gave to the car the feel of a boat rushing over the swells of a hidden sea. Her hands loose on the wheel and her dilated eyes fixed on the boiling column of the headlights, Mathilda let it run free through the moon-struck mists lying on the island moor.

She was just turned twenty. The man beside her was in the thirties. It was his car. Moreover it was his neck. But this was not what bothered Erd. "What can the child be thinking of, in that head of hers?" This was the question that ragged him and made him feel awkward and futile.

[1] From *The Man Who Saw Through Heaven* published by Harper and Brothers. Copyright by Wilbur Daniel Steele. Reprinted by permission of the author.

What Mathilda was thinking was: "That stuff Roy Glaze is carrying tonight is pallid. I couldn't get a kick out of a quart. I can't get a kick out of anything, though, any more. . . . Step on it, girl! A little speed! If we hit a fence, good night!"

Erd leaned nearer. "You won't get back to the club in time for the fox trot, Tilly."

She lifted her bare shoulders, shook her cropped hair in the wind of their flight, and gave the car more gas.

In a hollow full of white blindness there was a sudden hail of brush whipping the mudguards.

"'Bout far enough, Tilly."

"Yellow!"

The invisible ground sloped sharply upward. As the girl brought all her weight on the accelerator and the engine roared in answer, Erd leaned forward, found the ignition switch in the dark, and snapped it off. He pulled the brake lever back as the car came to a standstill; then he lighted a cigarette, the match shaking a little in his hand.

Her eyes narrowed. "Say, where do you get that? 'Fraid of your bus? Dad'll buy you a new one. You dead man! You poor *corpse!*"

Erd flushed. The insult was not in the words; it was in the fact that, of a generation still in the full of youth, he should be made to seem middle-aged and prudent-hearted by this child. Opening the door he stepped out and nodded ahead. "Come look."

"Not with you!"

Scrambling out the other side she ran. As she ran the grass and huckleberry tangle drenched her to the knees and sent fine waves of chill up her body. The lines about her mouth softened and vanished, her lips parted, she held her arms out, palms up, and lifting her chin she gave the

length of her throat to the impact of the particles of the mist.

"Not on your life!" she cried when the man, overtaking her, caught at her wrist. "You let me go, or I'll—I'll—"

He released her only when she stopped struggling and looked around.

"If you want to know where we were bound, Tilly, see there."

From the top of the rise to which their little dash had brought them the ground broke off in a twelve-foot precipice; beneath it, beyond a narrow beach rounded like the back of a breaching whale, the water came up and curved over in a lazy surf.

"That's where we were headed, forty an hour. Like that!" He made a graphic swoop with his hand.

"I wish we had. Oh, I wish to *God* we had. We'd have got a kick out of *that*, anyway."

He looked at her quickly. She made a sad mouth. "I wish I'd been alone." Producing a little gold vanity case she snapped back the mirror, took out a stick of carmine, and pursed her lips in the pale light. Then rebellion carried her away again. "It's all too deathly pallid!" she cried, clapping the trinket shut and throttling it in a fist.

Meeting Erd's troubled stare she shrugged her shoulders and gave her hair a fling. "Well, then, if you don't want me to talk this way and tell you the truth, come take me back to the merry-go-round."

She turned, and he turned with her. It was clear on the rise here; the fog lay only in the hollows of the moor. Two miles away Gravel Hill stood up like an island, topped by the Riding Club with its streaks of veranda lights and the arcs of wheeling motor cars.

Erd laughed, not knowing what else to do.

"You'll hardly get back for the dance you promised—what's-his-name."

"That egg? He slobbers!"

She went on with a sudden heat, "*Life* slobbers, Erd. It's *too* pallid! All that silly squirm they call dancing; all the sweet cocktails and the bum Scotch and the fuddling and fondling and the stories they've simply got to tell you behind the lilac bush! I guess I'm fed up with it, that's why: I've swigged it to the dregs and the kick's gone. I'm flat, Erd, *flat!* . . . And yet—where do I go from here?"

Studying her from the corners of his eyes, this creature toward whose perfection all things had worked—a conquered continent, laboriously gathered wealth, old colleges—seeing her standing there in the attitude of the revolt of youth satiate, Erd felt a stirring of hope.

"I'm glad you're beginning to see—"

"Oh, sush! *you* can say that, man. But look at me; I'm not ready to settle down and wither away quite yet. Life owes me a few thrills yet. I've got a few experiences coming to me. I have! I *have!* And I'm not a kid any longer, either. They've got to be wilder than a petting party or a gulp out of some lizard's flask behind the lilac bush. They've got to *hurt!*"

She looked Erd in the eyes, her own narrowed.

"I'll tell you what I need. If this sticky, loathsome, pallid summer will ever go and the shooting season ever come around, then maybe I'll be more like myself again. Yes, yes, don't look like a fish; *yes!* I'd feel like a million dollars right now, and I know it, with the weight of a gun in my hands and a cold old wind blowing and the ducks flying. Erd, there's a kick left there. A bang, and a kick, and a duck—"

Her mood changed swiftly. Her eyes lost their luster, and the brief animation went out of her tone.

"Ducks and rabbits! That's *some* wild adventure for a *grown* woman." She began to wail in real anguish, "Oh, Erd, I could cry like a babe; that's got away from me too; that's pallid too." Gripping the man's forearm in both her hands she shook it savagely. "It's got to be bigger than ducks! It's got to be wilder and fearfuller than Molly Cottontails; *I want it to kick!*" She stood there shivering. "That's that!"

Erd's face was red. He was embarrassed and he felt helpless.

"Come on, let's get back now." There was a hint of bluster. "I *told* you to bring a wrap. You're catching your death. Come!"

"There?" She nodded toward the clubhouse. "Not for perfect *worlds!*"

She pulled her elbow from between his fingers. Her skirts ballooning about her and her arms like fantastic wings, she was over the bank behind him and down to the beach in an avalanche of clods and sand.

He followed and caught up in the heavy going. "Let's walk then, fast."

"Let's run! Miles! Like fools!"

Presently she slackened pace. "Who's that, ahead there?"

"I don't know, Til. He's been standing there the past long while. Coast-guard, I guess; he's in uniform, anyhow."

Mathilda trilled. "Leave me, fellow. I *devour* uniforms!"

Ben Agate, the patrol from the Never's station, glanced around with impatience at the sound of their footfalls behind him. Then, having grown a bit hardened in six years on the island to the kind of birds the summer seasons brought, he passed a hand over his mouth, spat to the left,

and returned his attention to the point of rocks that broke the beach some twenty yards or so from where he stood.

Mathilda came up softly to his shoulder. She had forgotten her moods.

"Rum-runners?" she queried in a stealthy tone.

Agate shook his head.

"What, then?"

"You scared 'em. Be quiet and maybe they'll be comin' out again."

By and by the girl touched his sleeve. He forestalled her impatience, whispering out of the corner of his mouth:

"Look sharp, now. Keep your eyes glued on to that long flat rock just inside the end there and don't stir. They're having another try."

It was like staring at the black squares on the white ground of a chessboard and suddenly seeing them white squares on black. The first illusion was that the rock itself had come to life; that the whole of it moved slowly, turning wet facets to gleam in the moon's rays. Another wave, the seventh among sevenths, smothered the shelf, and the shapes that emerged from the draining green-white foam were three—three round sleek heads, three torsos, dark as basalt on the dark surface of the ledge, half-reared and swaying. In the distortion of the misted light, ranged all around by the pallor of the water and by the sound of it threshing in the crevices, the effect of their muteness and the mystery of their oscillating movements, like blindness trying the void, was magnified.

"But what on earth?" breathed Mathilda.

"Seals. What d'y' think?"

"You don't mean—honest-to-God *seals!*"

"Why, sure." Agate was gratified. "Don't you know a seal when you see it? You're s'prised they're here this time

o' year, eh? They're only strays. They was in night before last; Ed Whalen seen 'em. Here they be, sure enough. Two cows and a bull—and he's a good one, ain't he? Ain't he, though?"

Mathilda let her breath out in a sigh. "What you *will* see when you haven't got your gun along! If that isn't the luck!"

"Luck's right. You shoot one o' them there, and you'd have the law down onto you quick enough. You'd get a good fat fine. Say! What in hellnation—excuse me—but what in time you whoopin' about that way? You've give 'em another scare, Miss, and now I guess they're gone for good!"

"Not for *good*—just for the night, you mean. They'll come again tomorrow night, don't you suppose?"

"Ask *them!*"

Rubbing his wrist over his mouth and spitting once again to the left, Agate lifted his boots out of the sand and resumed his eastward way.

Mathilda wheeled on Erd. Reaching up she pinned his cheeks between her palms and rocked his head from side to side in outrageous glee. She was beautiful. The teeth gleamed between her dark lips, and her eyes, enlarged, were soft around the lids with tears.

"Do you love me, old dear?"

Erd flushed and scowled. "Stop it, you!"

"Adore me, eh? Then take me back to the merry-go-round and dance, tonight. Tomorrow night's another night again! We'll bring the guns."

The *Two Kates* came in through the shoals at dusk and lay at anchor a mile offshore. She was a power-sloop, built for swordfishing, but not in the business now. The pulpit still ornamented the stubby bow, to be sure, and

the irons and lines were still ready to the hand, but the hold was full of Scotch and Irish whiskeys, billed from the Bahamas for St. Pierre et Miquelon.

The master was an old swordfisherman and he knew these waters well. He knew that, with the glass where it was, he was as safe lying here off the beach as he would have been twenty miles to sea; there were only half a dozen men alive who could have brought a vessel through the labyrinth of shoals behind him, and none of them was in the enforcement fleet. He was so snug here, indeed, that he had gone ashore in the dinghy, himself, partly to see his wife and partly to talk with a man who handled things, leaving his crew of three behind him as confidently as he might have left three rats, no matter what their morals, overnight in a trap.

Al Bede, the Frenchman, and Bloch, the Saba boy, were asleep in the cuddy. Only Hildegarde, the Georgia negro, was awake and about. Part of the time he reclined, lifted on an elbow, on the deck between the wheel-box and the taffrail, staring thoughtfully into the curtain of black velvet covering the sky, or out across the water, black too at this hour before moonrise and almost as flat as a lagoon in the semi-lee of the shallows beneath the soft drift of the southerly wind. Part of the time, driven by restlessness, he prowled the deck fore and aft, peering over the bows, halting at the cuddy-hatch to listen for the snores of his mates, peering over the stern, making the round of the little ship again and again.

In this act of prowling he was as soundless on his naked soles as a phantom, and very nearly as invisible. Clothed only in a pair of tar-stained dungaree pants and otherwise bare to the soft weather, as more tolerable to a man hardened by seasons in the Arctic, his darkness merged with the darkness of the night. Even in the formation of

his flesh, which looked round and fat, as is often the case with strong swimmers, there was something of the quality of the night at sea, large, smooth, formless, hiding its power.

He was glad when, treading noiselessly in the dark, he could feel himself invisible. He wished he *were* a ghost, very often. Hildegarde was not his real name. He had gone by dozens, self-given; with every change of ship in the years of his wanderings he had rechristened himself, taking infinite pains with his papers. And this was a strange thing, since he had never committed a crime. His need of an alias, and one never too old, came from something buried more deeply in him than fear of the law. It would have made a white man laugh.

When he went back to throw himself on the deck near the wheel he put his elbows on the low rail and, resting his chin on his entwined fingers, stared straight down against the surface of the water, faintly vitreous under the cloud that cloaked the stars.

Presently, as he continued staring, as though his stare had been a solid to break and penetrate another solid, the surface was no longer there between his eyes and the depths; his vision, piercing it and passing on down through another atmosphere, began to pick up, glimmer by glimmer, the slow flight of things alive, the drift of creatures gelatinous and tiny, coruscating with pale phosphorescent fires, the lazy blur of flounders cruising the bottom, the sudden wheel of a greater fish, throwing out an arc of stars.

Once again, as on all such nights, it stirred the trouble in his mind. So it must have been that the eyes of the yellow woman had been able to penetrate the surface of the crystal ball she had held in her hand on that never-

to-be-forgotten night, and to see moving within the depths of its other atmosphere things luminous to her alone.

For years it had been too occult a mystery even to puzzle about. Now, after other years of these rare nights when, with the stars darkened and the wind in the south, he had found it in himself to be capable of dissolving the faintly vitreous outside of the water, by a simple trick of staring, and of reading all its hidden events in scrawls of flame, it began to seem to him that he could lift at least a corner of the veil that had hidden from his youth the powers of that yellow woman who was known as Zara the Great.

And so it was true and doubly true that what the soothsayer had said was sooth.

A school of mackerel streamed out from beneath the keel and upward across the man's inverted sight. Hundreds became thousands, till the sea for fathoms away on the beam was streaked with hairs of light, all combed out straight from the sloop's waterline, in terror. The reason for terror showed itself. In the midst of the faint threads a greater light flashed, turned on itself in a swoop of blue and was gone, leaving empty blackness behind.

"Sha'ks," the negro cogitated.

Again the hairs of light appeared and gathered, streaming in another direction a short toss off the quarter; again and again that whiplash of fire cracked and sent them vanishing in dim rays.

"Though I neveh seen no sha'ks swim like that befoh," he mused aloud.

He got up and walked toward the bows. Loitering a moment at the cuddy-hatch to hearken to the sleepers, he passed to the port rail and stood erect there, gazing down the side.

A milky cloud appeared beneath him. It floated toward

him, increasing in size and brightness, till it touched and broke the surface of the water. In that instant, by one of those freaks inherent in the phenomenon of phosphorescence, it sloughed off its cloud and became a silhouette, drawn in clinging beads of flame.

Hildegarde, when he had blinked once or twice, withdrew from the rail. Reaching behind him, he found and lifted from its chocks on the side of the house the swordfish iron that was there. Passing a hand over its length he made sure that the barb was settled properly in the ashwood shank and that the line ran freely from it to the coil in the tub abreast of the mast. He peeped over the rail once more. The shape still rode there, swaying lazily between the transparent elements. Stepping forward and bringing his right arm over his shoulder in the same motion, he flung the lance straight down.

A streak shot away from the boat's side; for a moment then there was no sound but the whine of the line coming out of the tub. Marking this with a practised ear, Hildegarde flipped a bight of it presently over a near-by pin and began to snub. The pressure eased sooner than he had expected. The iron must have bitten very near to the heart.

He began to haul in, hand over hand. Bede's head was thrust out of the cuddy. "W'at ze 'ell? You weesh to wake up ze devil?"

"Gi'me a hand here. I got somethin'."

The Saba boy tumbled out too, not quite knowing where he was. Among them they brought the carcass home and heaved it out on the deck, where it lay enormous in the narrow space between the rail and the house.

"That's no fish," said the Saba boy.

The negro made a scornful sound, half chuckle, half grunt.

Shielding it from shoreward, the Frenchman scratched a match and let it shine on the prize. "*Corps du diable—un veau marin!*"

Hildegarde got down on his knees beside the seal and passed a hand over the hide, laughing with glee: "Befoh God, this heah one is a big one!"

Now that the Saba boy was fully awake his Dutch blood reasserted itself; it was he this time who made the scornful sound. "You expected you had a great prize, what? That seal is no good to you. You expected you had fetched up a fine fur coat, eh, old chap? That's a *hair* seal. A cat would have been better." He yawned, shaking his head. "You may just heave it overboard yourself; you've made me lose enough sleep already with your foolishness."

Bede, an impressionable fellow, ready to follow any one's lead, yawned too, went off with an angry shrug, and let himself down the ladder after Bloch. For a few minutes Hildegarde heard them discussing him below in scurrilous tones; then abruptly all was still again.

The moon had risen. Blurred by the thin mist, its light fell diffused and weak, throwing no shadows. When he had stretched himself on his stomach on the house, Hildegarde rested his chin on his crossed arms and gazed down at the dead seal. His lips moved in amusement tempered by indignation.

"That Bloch, he's a Bloch-*head* for shuah. What he think? He think I don' know the diff'nce between one kine o' seal an' 'nothah kine o' seal? He think I stick this heah crittah foh to git a fuh coat? He think *that* why I kill 'im?"

Well, then, why *had* he killed this seal? The question, following the other as two follows one, presented itself to Hildegarde's troubled imagination. And as three fellows two: Why did he do any of the thousand strange things

he did? Why did he live the life he lived, a fugitive from no pursuer, a man of peace unable to find peace?

"Wha'-foh ain't I like folks? Tell me that."

This was the never-varying train. Whenever, on a night like this, he began by staring down through the black skin of the water, sooner or later he would end by trying to stare in through the black skin of himself.

"Wha-foh? How come?"

Memories stirred. His mind passed back over his voyages, his brutish, ill-paid and thankless labors, the succession of his aliases, like a succession of bulkheads slammed shut before the creeping of an impalpable flood; Hildegarde Dixon, Barrymore Wills, Wilson Barry, Algernon James, James Andrew Alger—and so on through the others—on down the monotonous years of his adventurous past.

Each one of these men that he had been had lived a life, brief but separate. They were like cards in a well-worn deck that he could riffle under the thumb of his memory.

Barrymore Wills went to the Arctic.

Wilson Barry went to Australia in a Danish brig.

James Andrew Alger was in the Arctic too. He was a sealer. But that was not the memorable thing about Jim Andy's thirteen months and thirteen days of life. Among them all it was Jim Andy who had succeeded in daring to rebel. In the city of Seattle he got drunk on sailor gin. From first to last he knew what he was doing, and he was terrified. Even when he had to lean against a lamp-post to keep himself from falling, one part of his head was as clear as crystal, and aghast—aghast at the drunken nerve of this nigger seaman, Jim Andy Alger, who would insist on standing there and daring fate, staring into the faces of white ladies with sullen, bold, defiant, abominating eyes

. . . expecting all the while to be shot and killed for his black insolence, nothing less.

Two days later (when he got out of jail) it was a new man, a scared and repentant darky by the name of Algernon James, who shipped in a three-master for Nova Scotia, through the Canal.

It was this same Algy James that was shipwrecked and cast away. Marooned on one of the lesser keys of the Caribbean, for upward of two months he lived alone. The only voices he heard were those of the sea fowl. He ran among the flocks and flew with them, leaping from shelf to shelf. Sometimes he swam with the sharks, diving deep, having no fear of the gliding shadows. One of them he killed with his sheath knife in a battle ten feet deep. Then he came up and sat on a peak of rock and sang a song without tune or words. He slept among the rocks where the lizards slept. That space of two months, escaped from humanity, the hail-fellow of beasts, was Paradise.

So now, as he lay dreaming over the body of the dead bull seal, his memory ran back over the riffling cards, ran back years and years into the years when he was still his own self, the Georgia nigger-kid, Roboam. And when it had run that far it came to the yellow woman.

She had a fold of soiled brocade on her head, confined by a hoop of silver. At times her face and the glass ball she held before it were cast in a hot red light, at other times in a cold and vivid blue. In the changes the skeleton half hidden in the carpets hung up around her throne seemed to approach and retreat. A curious-smelling vapor was in the air.

The boy Roboam could no longer bear it. No matter what the satanic consequence he had to cry out, as he had cried twice before, "Thah's my two dollahs thah! Wha'-

foh foh God's sake don' you-all tell me whah my brothah Japhrum's to?"

Again it was not Zara the Great, but the invisible attendant beyond the brazier that answered, "Sahlence! Kain' you-all see she's tranced? Sahlence, you-all, an' wait!"

Again he nerved himself to wait with patience in this night of no patience, and to keep silence in this silence thronged with distant hubbubs: sounds of feet running in crowds on pavements, sounds of voices, many and confused, or single, lifted in terror, or in idiot exultation, the crackle of flames among the negro shanties, crackle of trolley-car windows, crackle of white folks' rifles shooting to kill, crackle of policemen's revolvers shooting not to kill. . . .

Oh, was Japhrum there, was Japhrum there?

The sweat flowed down the boy's cheeks. His knees pressed together to keep from knocking. Once more he would have had to dare the powers and open his mouth had the conjuress not saved him by opening her own.

"I visions . . . I visions a cullad boy 'bout eighteen yeah ol', got on a brown coat and a payah striped gray pants—"

"Tha's Japhrum! Tha's him, yassuh!"

"Sahlence!" The attendant was moving about. "Kain' you-all see she's tranced?"

Then the strained high singsong continuing, "I visions him comin' 'long through Jim Bayliss' alleyway, I does. Right heah in the mi'st o' this heah magic crystal I visions him true as life. Comin' 'long out o' Bayliss' alley. Trompin' soft in the shadow 'hind o' the Heli-trope Bah-room. I visions him comin' to'a'ds a doah. I visions him comin' *in* at a doah. *I visions it's that thah ve'y doah behin' yoh back—thah—NOW!*"

The boy turned, wave after wave of prickles running up to his scalp, and saw a figure in the incense-clouded dusk. It was Japhrum. For a moment, between terror and joy, he could say nothing. It was Japhrum that spoke.

"I was comin' 'long into heah, aks the conjuh-woman whah-to you-all am, Roboam."

At that there arose a fine soft sound of laughter, sardonic, secret and wise. But when the boys turned to look at the great Zara her lips were tightly closed again in the waning ray of blue from the brazier, her face was as rapt as death, and her eyes engrossed in the globe of glass.

"I visions . . . I visions . . ."

Perhaps it was the dying light, or perhaps it was the deaths in the night, but now it seemed as if a change came over the hanging face. Its aspect was no longer that of the watcher, but of the listener. As though amplified by her own demoniac powers, the voices of black panic and white hate obtruded from the distance, drew closer, loudened and pressed around, till they were pulses booming behind the ears. A rhythmic twitching, little at first but growing in violence, convulsed the skin of the crystal-gazer's face; her lids sank till her eyeballs were no more than dull blue gleams, an epileptic twinge caught up a corner of her lip, baring one long tooth.

"I visions . . . I visions visions I kain't help visionin' now. God an' the Debbil! . . . You-all, Roboam, chil', draw nigh unto Zara and come heah."

If the boy could have turned and bolted, as terror counseled, the life that followed would have been a different life.

"Draw nigh! I says it twice an' I says it thrice! Come heah!"

He approached. The woman's hand imprisoned his neck, holding his head straight before the glass with the

strength of an iron vise. The fingers were cold and the palm was hot.

"Roboam, you hol' yoh breaf an' you pray to God an' the Debbil an' you staah whah yoh eyes is!"

There was no breath in him to hold. He stared where his eyes were, but for the shivering life of him all he could see was a glass ball with a film of dim blue light running around under its skin.

"I visions a man grown," he heard her voice in the gloom. It had risen to a queer high note, and there it held, behind her palate. "I visions this man by name Roboam. Look at this man smile an' show his fine white teef. Neveh I lay my eyes on such a man. His muscles, they the same like a stallion race hoss, and his skin it lay oveh 'em as smooth an' shiny as silk an' satin. I visions him walkin' on top o' the yuth an' admiahin' the fruits thah-off. . . . I visions . . .

"An' I visions—heah befoh my eyes I visions—God an' the Debbil, what's this ol' Zara visions—collectin' an' cogallatin' out o' the witch-mist? God an' Debbil, I neveh seen a gal like this, with di'monds in huh eahs! Haih the colah o' ripe fiel' cohn, an' black eyelashes as long an' thick as ropes! An' wha's this heah red rose-blossom gone an' drap its petals onto them cheeks? . . . Tu'n round a little mite moah, white gal. Much obliged to you. Theah! But I's bewildud. This ain't wintah in the mountains now, foh lan' sake! Pshaw, now, you got fooled, ol' Zara; that ain't no snow bank up no'th; tha's a gal's throat. Them thah's two shouldahs an' two ahms. . . . But how come all this cloud o' mist an' shimmuh? Lan'! that ain't nothin' no moh'n a pore cheap little dance dress, cost only a thousan' dollahs a yahd in a quality stoah. . . . But how come you can undehtake to dance, white gal, on two ankles you kain't sca'cely see through a mic-scope, an' two feet

get lost on the broad of a man's han'? . . . An' wha'-foh you smile with yoh ripe red lips, an' wha'-foh you cotch a breaf, an' wha'-foh you laugh?—"

The negro on the sloop's house lifted his head from his arms with a jerk. The mists had thinned; a fuller light of the moon, sailing high now, described the contours of his shaven skull, his neck, and the suave barrel of his torso, over which the skin lay smooth and shining, "like silk and satin."

He looked north; he looked south. A rim of white ran all around the iris of either eye. Humping to his knees, he crawled off the cuddy and began to pace the starboard deck. He moved without a sound, but he was no longer invisible.

He knew from long experience the futility of trying to fight off this reasonless cringing of the nerves when he recalled the yellow woman's prophecy; still, the instinct to resist was there. The cuddy was dark enough; he thought he would go below and lie in his bunk. His resolution failed. Turning away, he retreated aft and flung himself down and stared at the water, a furrow between his brows.

He could no longer look through the skin of the sea; it had become opaque and bright. His attention, catching at anything, fixed upon a thread of scum rings left by bursting bubbles a little way off the stern. Deepening the furrow on his brow, he set himself deliberately to wonder what manner of fish it might be that had left that filament of rime to betray its passage through the blue gloom of the sea.

Another thread appeared, slightly to the left, a dozen bubbles, mirroring each a bead of moon before it vanished. And suddenly a head was thrust from the water, shaking

drops away and turning, as Hildegarde's own head might have turned inquiringly, on a short thick neck.

The negro flattened on the planks. "Ol' Mistah Seal got a wife."

He hazarded another peep and ducked again. "*Two* wives, by gol! Cruisin' roun' han' in han', mistrustin' roun', spec'latin' roun' whah they ol' man done gone ascended into heaven to. . . . Damn! Wha'-foh I ain't got that thah iron handy *now?*"

He could have wormed his way along the deck to the harpoon, but he felt it would have taken too long; once he were to show himself above the line of the hull he knew that the cows, curious but shy, would be gone with a flick of flippers.

His hand came on something on a ledge of the wheel-box. It was a knife used for cutting gear, the blade as fine as a skewer from long whetting. The seals were drifting toward the port side all the while. Creeping to the starboard rail and sliding over it like a big soft inchworm, he let himself down.

Not a sound and hardly a ripple marked his entrance into the water. Holding the knife between his lips he sank. The sloop's bottom, foul with a long season, gave his fingers a purchase; turning on his back he handed himself down to the keel; once under it he gave the oaken beam a kick and sent himself out into the submerged moonlight beyond in a single long smooth plunge.

Neither of the cows had seen him. He lay, face up, a dozen feet below, as he might have lain on a bed of air in half a dream, watching the drift of phantasmal shapes, dark and graceful, sustained in the green-blue dusk of a chamber without walls. He was chilled, but for the moment the numbing of his muscles was not unpleasurable, like

being safely dead yet vividly alive. His lungs wanted air, but he hated to move. It seemed to him that he could have remained here forever and been glad, at rest and at peace in the cold sanctuary of the sea, bathed in light yet hidden, rocked by the buried billows of the tides, the playfellow and the secret-sharer of beasts and mites and monsters, of whom, strangely enough in this fearful man, he had no fear.

Of those seals silhouetted above him, with their sharp dog teeth and their powerful muscles, he was not in the least afraid. Even as they grew larger on his sight, being no longer terrified by anything, he began to forget that he had come to strike terror. The knife escaped his lips and drifted lazily before his eyes; he could have caught it, but he made no move.

The shapes became distinct and enormous. Whether he would or not, the air in his lungs was carrying him toward the air. He was seen.

He was rocked in his bed; the light above him boiled and brightened; under his back passed a current like a streak of wind. He was aware of shadows, wheeling swiftly and lost, swooping and lost again. Turned on a side, as a log is careened in an eddy, he found himself looking into a face. It was as dark and as glossy as his own. The brow was wrinkled in absurd perplexity, and strings of bubbles, like pearls, ran in the creases. The two eyes, magnified by a trick of moon in water, were full of amazement, inquiry, fascination and alarm.

Hildegarde's head popped from the sea. Blowing out the stale breath and taking in a clean one he began to laugh. Still laughing, he threshed the water with his arms and legs to start the blood. He looked at the sloop, lying behind him like a high dark wall, shook his head at it,

spattering drops in a ring, flashed his teeth in mutinous derision and, laying his face in the water, set off in the opposite direction.

He swam with the trudgeon stroke, leaving a white wake behind. He was no longer cold; the continued rhythmic play of his muscles and the rush of the water along his body warmed him and soothed his soul.

Here he was a man. Sweeping at easy speed across this kingdom of transparencies he was a lord. Not even the prophetic words of the yellow woman could molest him; here they suffered a magic more potent even than her own, and became witch babblings remembered from some childhood fairy tale. "Sleeky, shiny, game-shootin' gun!" Those were the yellow woman's words. Fabulous nonsense! What would a gun do here? Sink; that's what it would do. Down, down, down to the bottom, its powder soaked, and nothing more fearful than seaweed "droolin' outen its mouf" . . . and as for "bullet-blood all runnin' out on to the groun' "—that proved it! *Ground!*

He slowed up after a while and rested, treading water, his head in the air. On the silver plain two other heads were lifted. The seals converged and consulted. Presently, trailing faint arrowheads of ripple, they floated nearer, wrinkling their noses in wonder at this bizarre dark creature come up from the ocean's depths.

The man waited, keeping his chuckles in his throat. When they had come to within ten yards of him and began to hesitate he put his toes together and sank. He went down dead for about his own length, then flipped over and swam away with all his strength. He lost a chuckle and it made a bubble. A wild joy of play swept him. He ramped. When he planed up to breathe again his new playfellows reappeared, yards ahead.

He began to upbraid them in whispered glee, "You-all think yoh's so smaht! You-all think yoh's such rip-snohtin' speedy swimmahs! You-all look out for this heah cullad boy; he goin' tweak yoh tailses!"

They fled before his churning charge. He made a ruse of it and had a joke on them; diving, he changed direction and came up far away on a diverging course. When he saw them elevate their heads, mill around for a moment in indecision, then turn to make after him, he smacked his lips and guffawed with the delight of a ten-year-old. That's what he was.

"I's glad I's been a good boy and ain't done no evil. I's glad, oh Lawd, I's glad. . . . You little debbils you, you-all look out foh Roboam; he's full o' tricks."

He submerged once more as the seals ranged up, and at a fathom's depth lay motionless, "playing possum." He watched them wheeling about him in mystified orbits. He was sensible of the beauty of their strong and sinuous shapes and of the flowing grace of their movements; he wished that he too were as beautiful and as lithe and swift as these sea widows; he wished that he were a seal. When the bolder of the two, or the less wise, backed water in mid-swoop and lay hovering at arm's length from him, studying his face with disturbed soft-brown eyes, he felt of a sudden a bond of alikeness and affection which he had never been able to feel as subsisting between himself and anything alive in the world of everyday. More deeply he wished that it were not merely a strange and beatific interlude; that he were indeed a seal, the same big-shouldered bull he had slain; and that he might go on forever with these twain, striking out boldly on long migrations across the empty seas, diving through green caverns where no man was known, rolling and rollicking in the slant sun-

light of lost beaches, riding the tops of storm-billows and laughing at the storm.

Once more his lungs were bursting, and again the light in the purling crystal grew a paler and a purer blue. The words of the soothsayer rang fainter and fainter in his ears.

"*An' wha'-foh you smile, an' wha'-foh you cotch a breaf, white gal, an' wha'-foh you laugh an' stroke the bar'l o' that sleeky, shiny game-shootin' gun you got thah, with the smoke droolin' outen its mouth, an' wha'-foh you suck yoh red lips like they was wil'-bee honey when you look at pretty Roboam layin' thah on the groun'—layin' thah in the witch-light, so quiet, so peaceful, doin' nobody no mannah o' hahm? But, God heself an' Debbil heself, Roboam chil', how come you-all so paltry lazy? Wha'-foh you got yoh big mouf open to the sky? Wha'-foh you big teef shinin' to the sky? How come all this heah bullet-blood runnin' outen yoh skull-pate all oveh the groun'? Dead! Dead! DEAD!*" . . .

The head and shoulders of the man who was a seal broke the surface in a white fountain. The sound of his laughter, rich and vibrant, ran over the water and away through the smoke ring of the mists and mingled there with the laughter of lazy surf. The seals dived as they arose, startled; then appeared again, swimming away.

The one fear he had now was that he would lose them. "Don't you-all be scahed," he breathed between his lips. "I wouldn' hahm n' huht you. Soonah cut off my own right han'."

The water lost clarity and took on a milky hue. Strong forces lifted the swimmer and let him fall.

"I's glad I's been good. I's glad I's walk in the road o' the humble an' kep' my eyes on the groun'. Wha's that the preachah's always sayin', 'bout the res'rection an' the

life? I done been res'rected an' this am the life. . . . So, my beauties! So, my angel lovelies! Whah you-all gone to in this heah su'f-watah? Come 'long back a secon', my pretties, show yoh ol' man whah you gone."

A blade of rock heaved out of the foam and struck at him. Evading the thrust by a powerful swerve in mid-breaker, he slid into its lee and lay there, chin out, his eyes roving over the ribbon of the lost beach of his phantasy and up a blue-gray slope of stone.

"Thah, thah, my angels," he crooned, so low that it was drowned by the wash of the empty sea. " 'Tain't nobody but me; 'tain't. You-all knows I wouldn't hahm n' huht you, my pretties; no, no, no, no."

With infinite gentleness he slid his fingers up over the rim of the rock. One of the seals edged higher; the other, fascinated, stayed her ground, half reared, rocking a little from side to side. Still with that infinitude of gentleness he pulled himself breast-out on the shelf.

Lost beaches. . . .

He began to croon again. Resting on one hip and lifting on his elbows, he began to rock with a scarcely perceptible motion from side to side.

Empty seas. . . .

But something had happened. Lightning in the mist. A thud of wind. A thud of thunder. And where the pretty seals had been, before the gunshot, there was nothing now but rock.

"No, by golly! by damn! No-suh! No!"

He leaped to scramble after them, where they flipped from sight over the edge. His leap was an inch. The thud of wind that had struck his legs had numbed them! They too were nothing but rock. They frightened him; he tried to get away from the dead things, jumping his body along by kicking at the stone with the heels of his hands. He

threw himself this way and that with all the enormous strength of his arms.

In the smoky air there was more lightning. Another wind of lead. He heard no thunder this time, for his head had caved in.

His elbows buckled and he began to roll. Over and over he went rolling. He fell off something and into something, and it was dark.

It was not quite dark now. He had fallen into the bottom of a deep cleft outside the shelf. It was full of shadow, and of a sucking sound. When the breakers came it filled half to the brim with water, and when they retired the water drained away. Hildegarde knew nothing of all this.

He knew only that the blue light waned and slowly waxed and waned again, and in the cold gloom he heard the yellow woman:

". . . *God an' Debbil, I neveh seen such a gal like this, with di'monds in huh eahs.* . . ."

As, with that curious sucking sound, the gleam from the brazier began to brighten, he perceived that Zara had moved the crystal sphere, lifting it higher. And looking up against its nether side now, of a sudden his eyes did pierce the skin; he did see at last, "collectin' an' cogallatin' out o' the witch mist," the white shape the conjuress was seeing.

"Yes. . . . Haih the colah o' ripe fiel' cohn, an' black eyelashes as long an' thick as ropes. . . . Yes. Tu'n round a little mite moah, white gal. . . . Much obliged to you. . . ."

Perhaps it was the sputtering and sucking sound from the brazier; but now the soothsayer's voice had taken on a new queerness. It was as though it broke in upon itself from moment to moment with other voices.

". . . *That ain't no snow bank; tha's a gal's throat; them's two shouldahs an' two ahms.*" . . . "I'm sure I got the big one, Erd. You saw him kick, yourself. Oh, I got him, all right, all right. I could dance! . . ."

"*But how come you can undehtake to dance, white gal?*" . . . "It was that damn wave, after the second shot. But we should worry, Erd. Why don't you give me a glad look, you fish, you? Smile!" . . . "*An' wha'-foh you smile, with yoh ripe red lips, an' wha'-foh you cotch a breaf in yoh snowdrif' bosom. . . .*"

"I's dreamin' the ol' bad damn dream agin, tha's what I is . . ."

". . . *An' wha'-foh you laugh . . . an' wha'-foh you stroke the bar'l o' that sleeky, shiny, game-shootin' gun. . . .*"

". . . I feel like a million dollars, Erd. This is the life! Let's go! . . ."

". . . Whah-to you-all gone to, my pretties, my angels? . . ."

The blue coal in the brazier was turning red now.

". . . *An' how come you-all so paltry lazy, Roboam, chil'?* . . ."

As it reddened it darkened swiftly and went out.

GOLDEN WEDDING [1]

by Ruth Suckow

I

Ruth Suckow was born in Iowa in 1892. She was educated in Grinnell College and at Boston. For a short time she taught in the University of Denver but soon returned to Iowa, where she had an apiary at Earlville. She stands with Willa Cather as a sympathetic interpreter of the Middle West to the rest of America. From Miss Suckow's stories one can discover the character of life in the little villages and farms west of the Mississippi, for her work is an excellent honest portrayal of the people and times she has known. She has written *Country People, The Bonney Family,* novels; and *Iowa Interiors,* short stories.

"You ought to change your clothes, pa."

"What you in such a hurry to get my clothes changed for?"

"Well, you want to be ready when George comes in, don't you?"

"Aw, he won't get in today. How can he get the car through all this snow?"

"He will, too. Didn't they invite us out there?"

"Yeah, but they didn't know it was goin' tuh snow like this."

"You go now and put your other clothes on."

He grumbled, but finally obeyed—which was just like him.

Yes, but why did he always have to act this way? He had been doing it ever since they were married. He went through just so much grumbling first before he would do

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anything that he knew he must. It was the same thing over again every time they went anywhere; and all her prodding hadn't done any good that she could see.

"Won't get in today." That was just like him, too. If he knew that she was counting on anything, he had to hold out and belittle it, raise objections. He never wanted to admit that anything was going to turn out right. He always had good arguments to oppose to her faith, which he declared didn't take any account of the facts. But she still held to this blind faith of hers, and he to his objections. Sometimes things worked out her way; sometimes his. She pulling ahead, he pulling back. But the pulling had amounted to this much in fifty years—that he usually gave in in the end; and that she was a little worried in spite of her hopeful assertions that things were going to justify her belief.

So that now she did have to admit to herself that it was snowing hard. She was sure that George would come . . . but her eyes screwed up anxiously as she looked out over the plants at air thick with misty flakes. It looked as if it wasn't going to stop all day. The covered plants and peony-bushes just outside were big clumps of whiteness. Fine dark twigs stuck out from the snow humped over the bending raspberry-bushes. When she peered down the street, she could barely see the willow-trees at the farther end, bluish and dim. Few passers-by came down this little side street where the old Willeys lived. The glimmery softness of the white road showed only two crooked tracks from a morning milk-wagon that were already nearly filled, and as white as all the rest of the world.

Just the same, she believed that George was going to get in somehow.

Mr. Willey came back into the room.

She looked up sharply, and cried in despair: "Oh, pa, why did you have to go put on that old necktie?"

"What old necktie?"

"Oh, you know what I mean! That old thing that I should think you'd be ashamed to wear around the place any more, let alone where we're going today. Go and put on your nice one—the one Jenny sent you for Christmas."

"Whatta I wanta put that on fur! To ride out in the snow?"

"Snow!" she scoffed. "How's the snow going to hurt it? Can't you cover it up? Now you go and put that on. Try and look decent for once, today. You don't know who may be there to see us."

"Yes, you keep talkin' about that. Who do you think's goin' to be there?"

"Well, pa, you know the dinner's for us."

"Oh, I guess they ain't such a whole grist of folks comin' out in all this snow jest to eat dinner with *us*."

"You go and put that other tie on."

He went. But her small frail hands, bluish and veined, shook a little at the crocheting with which she was trying to fill in the time. Her eyes moistened, and her mouth tightened into a childish grimace of weeping. Why did pa have to be so mean—and just today? They knew each other with such terrible intimacy that each had an uncanny perception of just what tiny things could hurt the other. Pretending this dinner wasn't going to amount to anything; depreciating her proud glory as a bride of fifty years; bringing up the sense of all the intimate, dingy happenings to tarnish the splendor of this occasion. Putting on that old tie today was a blow at her importance as his wife, at their marriage. He was always insisting upon their age and insignificance . . . and the silent,

ghost-white street, the meagerness of their little yard with the few bushes, the bleak lines of the storm entry, those half-filled wheel tracks—all bore him out. Two old people, out of things, living in a little house off the main road. Denying the significance of their one achievement of continuity.

It made her bitter, too. What did it amount to that they had been married fifty years? Pa was so mean. Sentimental thoughts with which she had begun the day—unconsciously framing themselves in her mind in the grandiloquent terms of the town paper—were stringently checked by the terrible familiarity of his attitude. Just then, she didn't see why she *had* been such a fool as to have lived with him fifty years—why any one should celebrate it.

Oh, well—but then, that was pa. After all, she knew how much the grumbling amounted to. Why did she let herself be so riled by it every time? Her best dress of dark-gray silk, shimmering so nicely in the light from the window, raised the occasion, would not let her feel harsh. She knew that all those objections were partly a defense against the ill fortune of which they had had enough—he was not going to admit that things might turn out well, so that he wouldn't be disappointed again. He had had to make an assertion with that old tie to conceal a sneaking hope that this dinner might be a big affair, with people met to celebrate. Their long years together stretched out before her inner vision . . . He'd been a pretty good husband after all, had worked hard, hadn't spent his money for drink or run after other women. She supposed you couldn't have everything.

She cried excitedly: "Pa! Here comes George! Now you hurry up and get yourself ready."

But she was the one, after all, who had to scurry to the

dresser for a last hairpin to stick into her neat little knob of hair, to refasten her brooch in her lace collar, search for another handkerchief. He was ready, tie and all, and she was still in the bedroom when George, their son-in-law, came stamping in, scuffing the thick soft snow off his big overshoes.

"Ain't you ready, folks?"

"Ma! Hurry up! Well, what in thunder's she doing? Thought she was ready an hour ago."

II

"I didn't know as you'd get here, George."

"Yep—oh, there's lots of ways of gettin' in."

"The old bobs still come in pretty handy, I'll tell ye," Mr. Willey said.

"Wrapped up good, grandma?"

"Oh, yes, I know how to bundle." Her voice came muffled through the fascinator that she had wound around her head over a knitted hood. She stepped along blindly behind George, down the covered walk, squinting against the misty flakes, trying to keep hold of the coarse brown hair of George's fur coat . . . feet making soft cavernous dents in the thick snow . . . "Why, there's Reverend and Mrs. Baxter in the bob, ain't it?"

"Yeah, they're going along with us. Can yuh get in, grandma?"

George lifted her over the side of the bob, and with a little scramble she managed to get in. The Methodist minister and his wife were tucked snugly into a corner. Mr. Baxter shouted jovial greetings. Mrs. Baxter smiled and nodded, only glints of eyes showing between squinted eyelids, two little hard red cheeks and a ruddy blob of nose let out of the big scarf tied over her head.

"Get in. Lots of room."

Four ministerial feet in heavy, shining rubbers were hitched awkwardly over the thick robe covering the floor of the bob, through little holes of which stuck bent yellow straws. The old people squatted down stiffly, and Mr. Baxter drew the fur robe over them.

"Well, how's the wedding party?"

"Oh . . . I guess they're all right," Mrs. Willey said with shy pleasure.

"Looks more like a silver wedding than a golden wedding today."

"Yes, ain't the snow bad?"

"All fixed back there?" George called.

"All fixed! Let 'er go!"

"*Gid*-dap!"

The two big horses gave a plunge forward, the bob rocked, tilted up on the edge of the road. . . . They passed the snowy willows and got out on the main road, where there were already silvery-smooth bob tracks above the gravel, no ruts to make the women give little shrieks and put out their hands blindly. The horses settled into an even trot.

"Isn't this nice, though?" Mrs. Baxter exulted.

All felt the exhilaration. The strangeness of the snow made the day a festival.

They stopped trying to shout things at one another, getting the wet small flakes in their mouths. They snuggled down on the straw under the fur robe. The bob went softly through the new, pure whiteness. Snow kept falling, gentle as mist—tiny flakes, and big tufted splotches. The road ahead and the road behind were lost—there was only a place of dim white silence, and they moving in it.

"Are we there?"

"Why, I guess we are!"

"I didn't hardly know where we're getting."

The bob trundled over the wooden planks across the ditch and into the drive between the willow-trees that were blue-brown through the snow . . . misty, dream-like, strange. The place had a festive air, too, because of the magic difference the snow made—the big barn roof white against the shrouded sky; the old wagon standing out there softly covered, rounded, all its stark angles gone.

"Well, I guess I didn't spill anybody out," George said.

They plodded to the house. George had let them out near the back door. They went up the steps, with a great stamping and scuffing—Clara in the doorway urging them in, they protesting that they must "sweep themselves off."

"Aw, it's just the kitchen—won't hurt this floor—come on in."

They went in, brushing and shaking. At once they were enveloped in warmth from the big range, with scents of chicken browning, biscuits, coffee, that their nostrils breathed in with a sharp deliciousness . . . snow melting on their wraps, shaking off in a fine chill spray, making pools on the linoleum. They had a glimpse of Darlene, the youngest girl, at the stove, her face flushed a deep hot rose under the brown hair. Many dishes about. . . .

"Oh, don't stay in here!" Clara was urging. "No, your things won't hurt anything. Ain't the first time there's been snow in this house today."

Mrs. Baxter and Mrs. Willey found themselves pushed into the chilly downstairs bedroom, where they unwrapped scarfs and fascinators, and where Mrs. Baxter—with apology and an alert glance at the door—yanked up her skirt and revealed black woolen tights which she tugged off her portly legs.

"Didn't know but what the snow might get in," she panted. "So I thought I'd come prepared. I guess I won't

shock you ladies getting these off—hope none of the men'll look in here—might see a sight—"

"They ain't around," Clara said comfortingly. "That's just all right—just the thing to wear."

Clara stood until the wraps were off. She was heated, so that her grayish-brown hair looked dry and sheeny above her flushed face. She wore a bungalow apron. And yet she looked festive, too. Extra clean, her mother thought, with her fat arms bare to the elbow, her perspiring neck.

"Well, if you've got everything you want—"

"Oh, yes! Don't pay any attention to us, Clara. I'll come out and help you just as soon as I get my things off."

"No, now, ma. You go in the parlor and visit with Mrs. Baxter. I don't want either of you in the kitchen. Minnie'll help me."

"Oh, is Minnie and John here?"

"Yes, they're here. Minnie's here and the rest are coming."

"Well, I guess we'll have to obey," Mrs. Willey said with a pleased flattered laugh.

They went into the parlor and seated themselves nicely. Mrs. Willey bent down to pick off a tiny straw clinging to her gray silk dress. Then she folded her hands and rocked.

She had half expected all along to find people here. And she saw no one but Clara and Darlene, and her daughter-in-law Minnie, who peeped in a moment. But the minister's family being here made it all right to have worn the gray silk—justified her in having ordered the necktie. Mrs. Baxter had on a dark-blue taffeta that rustled as she rocked.

All the same, the old lady could sense an air of preparation. The odors in the kitchen, that quick, half-realized glimpse of dishes . . . Even the bedroom had been specially clean; a glossy white scarf on the dresser and the tatting-edged pillow shams. Clara had her best things out. The dining-room door was closed. Yes, and in the parlor too the chairs were set so neatly. The perfect order of the mission table suggested something beyond the everyday. As they rocked, Mrs. Willey was alert for every sound. There was a shrill excited tone in the noise and laughter in the kitchen, abruptly stilled, and then breaking out again; a tramping, a going back and forth that suggested more people in the house than were apparent; children's voices in some upstairs room.

The realization of the occasion brought back heightened memories. As she looked about the parlor, with its new Victrola and davenport and miscellaneous chairs, Mrs. Willey was on the point of saying to Mrs. Baxter: "This don't look much the way the place did when Mister and I first came here!" But she could not communicate that poignant memory of the old rooms, that was somewhere deep in her mind . . . small, bare, the few walnut furnishings, the feeling of raw openness all around. . . . She rocked. Her eyes had a distant look.

She was excited by the scents from the kitchen, the subdued bustle there.

Shouts came from outside. Mrs. Willey turned quickly to the window—the shouts an answer to her expectation.

A great bob load was coming up to the house, rocking as it turned into the drive—people shouting, waving. Mrs. Willey's hands felt trembling, her heart beat sharply, as she rose. The two old people stood blinking, she gratified, he sheepish, as a confused lot of people came tramping in, and crying:

"Where's the bridal couple? Look at the blushing groom! Well, well, well—many happy returns of the day!"

III

The dining-room door opened—

"Go in, ma."

"Yes, the bridal couple must lead the way."

The old people protested, as a matter of duty, but inwardly pleased to be pushed in ahead of the others, to sit at the head of the long table. Old Mr. Willey looked sheepish—all this splendor for an old couple like them. But Mrs. Willey was exalted. She saw the room in a heightened dazzle of bright confusion—glitter of tumblers, plates and silver, shine of white and yellow. Laughing, calling, appreciative murmurs . . . and then all of them standing there, suddenly and uncomfortably grave, Mrs. Willey still tremulous with excitement, while the minister gave the blessing, appropriately solemn and loud-toned . . . only one high, unconscious piping from the children's table in the corner.

The company seated themselves. The laughter, the murmurs broke out again.

"My, isn't this lovely!"

"Well, grandma, what do you think of it?"

"Well, I . . . I don't hardly know *what* to say," the old lady quavered.

The others laughed delightedly.

But as she sat at the head of the table, waited upon, getting served first, gradually things began to emerge out of that first shining confusion. She had known that this would happen, marvelous as it was. She recognized her daughter-in-law Minnie's best table-cloth, pieced out at the farther end (where George sat) with one of Clara's—that table-cloth with a crocheted border, that had been

laid away in a chiffonier drawer to be peeped at by admiring women, that had been used only at the weddings of Minnie's daughters. The granddaughters must have brought their best wedding silver in carefully packed baskets. Clara and George had never accumulated any silver. But even more thrilling than this was the festive look of the room, with its decorations—the yellow crêpe paper drawn from the center-piece and tied in bows at the four corners, the yellow tissue paper flowers (Gertrude was the one who had made those) at every place . . . and all the decorations converging significantly toward the center of the table where a huge cake frosted in yellow, frilled about with paper and flowers, stood under a hanging, ruffly, yellow wedding bell.

She looked about the long, crowded table. They were all there—all the people whose lives were bound up with hers and pa's. Clara and George, Minnie and John, grandsons and grandsons-in-law, "connexions" from Prospect and the country around; even Nels Olson, a prosperous merchant in town now, but years ago the Willeys' hired man. The children at the square table were gleeful, and in their best.

And it was for them—for her and pa. She felt that exalted swelling in her breast, and tears stayed just behind the surface glisten of her eyes. Let pa say again that they were old and left behind, that no one thought of them, their day was over! No, this occasion was as glorious as she had been imagining it, in spite of his pessimistic objections. After all these work-filled years—fifty years—that had seemed at times to be petering out into a small meager loneliness, to sit here, honored, receiving again the delicious food and wine of personal recognition. All her people met to do her honor, to show that her life-work had counted. . . . There was just one little twinge

of disappointment. Robert had not come from Seattle. She had thought against all reason that when she opened the door, she would miraculously find Robert. She was glad she had mentioned it to no one. Pa's scoffing would have been justified.

It showed the grandeur of the occasion that Clara was "sitting down to table" beside George; although she gave hasty uneasy glances toward the kitchen. She had changed her apron, at the last minute, for her best dark green taffeta, above which her fat neck and face were flushed hotly. The granddaughters were waiting on the table, squeezing in between the chairs and the wall with their great platters of fowl, and bowls of gravy, and shining coffee-pot. The meal was like an old-time harvest dinner in abundance—besides the chicken, two big platters of goose that Minnie had cooked at home and brought over warm, and covered, to be heated in Clara's oven; potatoes, baked beans, escalloped corn and peas, three kinds of bread and biscuits, relishes and jellies and pickles. But there were, besides, the special dishes that marked the importance of wedding and reunion dinners in Prospect and the country around—perfection salad, made the day before by the married granddaughters, great biscuit pans full of it; mayonnaise; and the women guests at the table had already discerned that the huge, yellow-frosted cake was Golden Companion, for which Lottie Disbrow had the community recipe.

The first absorption in food was giving way to a chatter. The children at the small table were yielding pieces of chicken that they had snatched, consenting to wait for "something *awful* good" promised by mothers in a deep whisper. Faces shone and glistened with warmth and food . . . and past the window-panes drifted the last aimless flakes of the big snowfall.

There were satisfied, admiring comments on the food. . . . "Ain't these biscuits just fine! You make these, Clara?" "Yes. I was afraid they wasn't going to come out good." "Oh, they're lovely!" . . . "More chicken? Well, sir, I've had a good deal already. Do you let folks have their third piece?" A worried "Oh, now, Henry, you want to be careful. You've had enough." "Aw, go on and take it, Reverend. You need that drumstick."

John said expansively: "Don't pay any attention to the womenfolks! This is the time when a fellow can eat all he pleases. Can't have a golden-wedding dinner every day."

"Yes, but then you'll expect your wives to run around for you maybe half the night because you eat too much again," Minnie put in smartly.

All the wives murmured: "I guess so!" And laughed significantly.

But the men said: "Time enough to worry about that afterwards. Anyway, I can't see but you're eatin' plenty yourself."

Talk, clatter of dishes, shrill voices of children, babies waking and wailing in the bedroom. Mrs. Baxter said: "It seems a shame to eat, and spoil this lovely table." But it was spoiled now—littered—the hand-painted jelly dishes messy, the salad bowls nearly empty, some of the crêpe paper torn and pushed askew. The dinner was ending. The girls brought heaping dishes of home-made ice cream with chocolate sauce.

"Oh, my! Look at this! I don't know where the room for it's coming from, but I'll have to find some."

Mr. Willey muttered: "What's this stuff on here?"

Mrs. Willey nudged him. "Pa! That's choc'late."

"Huh! Well, I dunno—"

"You rather have yours without, grandpa?"

"No, no!" Mrs. Willey protested, shocked. "He'll eat it this way. It looks lovely." She gave him a look.

The women perceived—felt in the air—what was about to come. But some of the men took up their spoons, began to eat, were reprimanded by their wives, and looked about, belligerent and then subdued. Mrs. Willey knew what it meant. Her small, faded mouth quivered. Clara was getting ready, half apologetic, to make the people listen. Gertrude stood behind her grandmother's chair, smiling.

"Sh! Sh!"

Clara got up with difficulty, squeezed between the table and her chair. Her voice had the toneless quavering of one unaccustomed and half ashamed to speak before others.

"Friends . . . and—a . . . As long as this is our mother's and father's golden-wedding day, maybe now we better ask mother to cut the wedding cake."

Mr. Baxter relieved the silent moment that followed by a loud, cheerful "That's right—let the bride do it." There were repetitions of "bride"; and they all laughed and murmured. Gertrude handed her grandmother the large knife; and the old lady, her hands trembling slightly, cut through the Golden Companion. The first wedge came out, moist, rich and yellow. They applauded. There were shouts of laughter when Mr. Baxter found the old maid's thimble in his piece. Lottie Disbrow had marked the location of the ring, and Gertrude gave that piece to her grandmother.

"I'm gonna be rich—look, mamma, I'm gonna be rich!" one of the children cried, holding up the coin.

The wedding cake was passed about the table. The groom's cake—a dark, spicy fruit cake—was brought in already cut. Plates of angel food were passed about—"Better eat this, girls," the women told the unmarried girls, "and save your wedding cake to sleep on!" Now all

the table relaxed into a warm, easy, chattering exhilaration. Even old Mr. Willey had dropped his defenses, carried along by the spirit of the hour.

How did every one feel it now? But those still talking relapsed into startled silence. Throat-clearings. The men looked down, rigid, embarrassed. The children turned with round, bright, fascinated eyes. Mrs. Willey's heart pounded. Clara's eyes began to water.

The Reverend Mr. Baxter rose, tapped on his glass with his knife.

"Sh—sh!" to the children.

Silence.

Mr. Baxter began to speak. Although he spoke in the slow, portentous voice that he used for the texts of his sermons, only significant phrases stood out, echoed and diminished in the minds of the listeners . . . "met together today . . . do honor to these two people . . . long journey together . . . achievement . . . God's blessing on this couple . . ." Words irradiated by the winter sunshine that came through the windows now, sparkling off the snow, and striking iridescence from the silver and glass, the glossy table-cloth, the warm shining heads of the listening children. The old couple at the head of the table took on a deep significance into which a lifetime of meaning was compressed, brought to a sudden realization. . . . "And now I have been asked by all these good people to present this token of the occasion. And may it always bring to your minds, Mr. and Mrs. Willey, the memory of the affection of your children and neighbors, and their appreciation of your having reached this day."

He took the package that Gertrude handed him. Old Mr. Willey had to receive it—unwrap it—show to every one the silver loving-cup. There were applause, hand-clap-

pings, nose-blowings. A telegram from Robert was read. The sun shone warmly on the silver cup with its gilt lining, flashed off the two handles. The old lady could only murmur that she "thanked her dear children and neighbors." But the old man was flushed, carried beyond himself. He saw everything heightened . . . and his vision, like his wife's, stretched back and back to scenes so long ago that he scarcely knew how to communicate his sense of them. But he had to say something if she didn't.

He remembered when he first came out to Ioway, he said. The bob ride had brought back old times. Things that the children had thought old stuff, the tales that old men tell sitting on benches in front of the hotel—they listened to now with a sense of drama and event, of time passing. When he talked about the wedding day fifty years ago, the children heard him with delighted appreciation.

"In them days, we didn't go to all this fuss we do now for weddings. When folks wanted to git married, they just hitched up and drove into town, and that ended it. Well, sir, I was thinking what kind of a day that was. Not snowy—one of them real muddy days—and I tell ye, there was *mud* in those times! You fellers talk about roads, but you don't know what roads can be. Well, sir, we'd fixed on that day—and I was willing to put it off—but *she'd* got her mind set on it and of course it had to be. ["Asa!" Applause from the men, protests from the women.] We took my brother Luke's team, and him and me and her and Luke's girl—girl he had then, name of Tressy Bowers, she went out to Dakoty later—we started, with the horses all slicked up and their manes combed out, to drive into Prospect. Well, good enough goin' for a ways—and then jest out here beyond where Ted Bloomquist's place is now, we run into one of them mudholes about three foot deep.

Mud splashes up—girls screeches—and them two horses gits stuck so they can't pull out. Well, then the womenfolks had a time! They don't want us to git out in the mud because it'll spoil our wedding clothes, and they ain't nothing else for us to do but set there until somebody comes along. Well, a fellow did, and he helped us, and we got out.

"But then me and Luke's about as muddy as the team, and the women thought it was awful to go into town to the preacher's that way. So before we reached town—right down there by the crick, in what's Hibbert's pasture now—they made us fellers git out; and the girls they took sticks and whatever they could find handy, and tore a big chunk out o' their underskirts—women wore plenty o' clothes them days—and they made us fellers stand up and hev the mud scraped off our pants—and then when we's cleaned up a little, we went along to the preacher's and got married."

"And it's lasted quite a while!"

"Yes, sir. He done a good job of it."

Mrs. Willey was flustered, protesting—"You know it wasn't near as bad as that! What do you want to go and tell such things for?"—blushing when the underskirts were mentioned. In the warm, relieved, easy glow that followed, the loving-cup was passed about the table and admired. The names of all the givers were engraved upon it; and beneath the names of Asa Willey and Angie Pilgrim Willey, the two dates: 1874-1924.

Finally it was time to leave the table. The granddaughters would not let the older women into the kitchen. Carrie Gustafson had been called to help out with the dishwashing. The others went into the parlor, all the women urging one another to take the best rockers; looking out of the windows and commenting that the day had

"turned out nice" after all. They were moving still in that warm, easy exhilaration that came from food and coffee and that high moment at the table. "Tired, grandma?" "Oh, no, I ain't tired." The sun glistened on the snow. Mrs. Willey sat in an ease in which it seemed that she could never know what fatigue was—strangely free, her spirit exulting, doing what it pleased with her body. The great dinner was over, but the day was not ended yet. There were things to come. And then there would be the afterglow lingering for a long, long time.

"Guess we'll have a little music, folks," George said.

They listened, sentimentally gratified, when a mellifluous barytone with an overdone accent sang *Silver Threads Among the Gold.* But the murmuring and chatter, the pleas and shouts of children, sounded above the music—George's few "good" records, conscientiously played: *Il Trovatore, A Perfect Day, The Last Rose of Summer.* George began to yield to the children's pleas for "This one, grandpa," "Play this one, Uncle George"—*Morning in the Barnyard* and the "Uncle Josh" monologue. The room was filled with a high noise of chatter, laughter, resolute music, sounds from the kitchen . . . and outside, the sun sparkling off the great, untouched spread of snow across the yard and fields.

Shouts from the road, and then a running to the windows. Charlie, one of George's boys, came tramping into the house, ruddy-faced, in his sheepskin coat . . . from somewhere a jingle of sleigh-bells. The girls followed him from the kitchen, dish towels in their hands.

"Well, grandma and grandpa, do you want a sleigh-ride? Team's out here ready."

The others urged, laughing, excited, pushing toward the dining-room windows from which—through a blinding sparkle—they could see the sleigh. The young men

were out there, patting the horses. They had got the Tomlinsons' old two-seated sleigh, that had been packed away in a musty, cluttered barn corner for years. It was furbished, decked with sleigh-bells the boys had found somewhere; John's big horses stamping, shaking and turning their heads to see where the jingling came from, letting out clouds of silvery vapor.

"It ain't cold—just grand! Better go, grandma."

"Take your wedding journey!"

The bedroom was full of women laughing, encouraging, helping to bundle her into heavy wraps—shouting to George to get his fur coat for grandpa. There was discussion as to who should have the place beside Charlie. "You go, Clara." "Oh, no—some of the rest of you." "Mr. and Mrs. Baxter—" "Oh, no, no! Let some of these little people." "Me, mamma! I want a sleigh-ride!" "No, you children can have lots of fun here." "I think Clara'd ought to go. She's the only one ain't had a ride today." Clara would not go without Minnie. The two plump women were packed into the front seat, with Charlie squeezed between them. The old Willeys had the place of honor in the back of the sleigh.

All the company flung on wraps, shawls, whatever they could pick up, and hurried out to the back steps to watch the sleighing party leave. The women hugged their arms in their shawls, squinted against the sharp flash of sun from the drive and glistening shed roofs.

"Look-a there! Ain't that great?"

They pointed to the placard that the boys had fastened with a white streamer to the back of the sleigh—JUST MARRIED.

"Get back—get those kids back. These horses are rarin' to go."

The clustered company waved, shouted, as the sleigh

started with a jerk and frosty jingle of bells; watched it out of sight around the turn; then went back to the house, away from the white emptiness in which the new sleigh-tracks had left steely marks.

Bobs had been along this road since it had stopped snowing, making the going easier. The jingling bells, the sky a dazzle of blue after the snowfall. . . . The world they were passing through was as shining, remote, as those ethereal, silvery hills and thickets drawn on frosty window-panes. The sunlight glittered on the horses' smooth-curving backs. The sleigh runners left narrow, hard, flashing tracks. The low rounded hills were crusted deep with sparkling white. Corn stalks, humped with snow, shone stiff and pale gold. They had to close their eyes against that blinding radiance.

They drove into Prospect—not down that little street where the old people lived, but "right through the main part of town." People halted at the sound of bells, laughed at the placard, waved and called out greetings. The sleighing party, warmed still by the happy intoxication of the wedding dinner, responded hilariously.

"What's this—an elopement?" Judge Brubaker shouted.

"We've got to stop for you to have your pictures taken," Clara turned to say.

"Oh, no!" Mrs. Willey protested.

But she liked it—even grandpa liked it.

They climbed the sloping wooden stairs to the gallery, covered with thick soft snow. The photograph would be in the Des Moines paper. "Prospect Couple Celebrate Golden Wedding." It would have their names—tell about the loving-cup and Robert's telegram. The long room of the gallery, filled with snowy light, had the same dazzle as the street today.

The old man was lifted above his gloom and forebodings. He raised his wife's hand clasped in his, and shouted back at people. A crowd of little boys swarmed out into the road, making for the sleigh with ludicrous determination. "Hop on, boys!" he called jovially. They clung until a jerk at the corner threw them off the runners; and they still trailed the sleigh for a block or two.

IV

"Well, was the ride nice, grandma?"

"Oh, it was fine!"

"Get cold?"

"Not a bit cold. . . . I guess I am a little chilly now, though."

And as she trudged up through the heavy snow to the farm-house again, she realized that the afternoon was late, the best of the sunshine over. When she went into the house, too, there was a different feeling. The big bob-load of people had left during the sleigh-ride. Now there were only the family themselves—the granddaughters sitting wearily in the parlor after their long siege in the kitchen. "Oh, children, be still awhile. You make such a racket." Carrie Gustafson was plodding about in the kitchen doing the last of the cleaning up.

Standing in the bedroom, taking off her many wraps, Mrs. Willey realized that the chill of the winter day had sunk into her. Her eyes were reddened, her small faded lips were blue. Her thin frail hands felt stiff and chilled.

"I guess you did get kind o' cold, grandma."

"Oh, not so very. It was awful nice."

They sat about in the parlor, where the grandchildren were playing with undiminished liveliness, even wilder than at noon. The older people were tired. The men talked, and the women, in two camps. Then some of the women

went out to the kitchen to "set out a few things for supper."

"Now, don't go to a lot of trouble. We don't really need a thing after all we've et."

"Oh, the men'll want something. We'll just put on what's left."

But when they went to the table, the cold goose and chicken, the warmed-over potatoes, the different bits of salad, tasted good after all. There was a revived cheer, an intimacy in gathering around the remnants of the great meal after the outsiders had left. The glossy tablecloth had spots of jelly. The yellow bell still hung there; but the flowers and crêpe paper and wedding cake were gone. Plates of angel food and fruit cake, a little crumbled, were put on. The coffee tasted better than anything else.

Under the old woman's smile lay tremulous fatigue. She could scarcely sit at the table. As soon as the meal was over, George hitched up the bob to take the old people and some of the grandchildren home.

"Well, sir, it's been quite a day!"

Now they had seen too much to notice the whiteness of the fields that they passed, the willows dim and motionless. The straw was warm under the robe on the floor of the bob. The *plop-plop-plop* of the big horses' hoofs was magically soothing . . . and the slight jolt and sway of the bob, going over rough places in the road, turning corners. . . .

They were all surprised when the bob stopped.

"Are we here?"

"Sure. Where'd you think we was?"

"Why, I didn't hardly know."

"Wait a minute, grandma, I'll lift you out."

George lifted her over the side of the bob. When he

put her down, her legs felt stiff and queer, and she could scarcely make her feet move. She looked with a kind of wonder at the house standing bleak, silent, no shine from the windows, no smoke from the chimney. She entered it with the feeling of a traveler from splendid scenes who still carries a trace of their radiance with him to shed upon the familiar home. The little entry was cold.

"Wait a minute," George said. "I'll get your fire going for you."

"Oh, you needn't to bother, George."

"Sure. Only take a minute."

The sound of his heavy boots, the crackle of wood and rattle of coal, made a cheerful bustle. "There! I guess she'll warm up now." Then he was gone. Shouts of good-bye from the bob—it trundled off down the snowy street, around a corner.

It seemed as if the day could not be over. But they were in the house together. There was nothing for them to do, after all, but to go to bed.

V

Their bedroom was chilly.

It took the old woman longer to put away all her cherished best things—her silk dress and lace collar and brooch. He was in bed long before she was, and impatient. She wanted to linger. The silk dress kept the feeling of occasion. There was still a sense of exaltation—a jumbled memory of the dinner, the shining table, the jangle of bells and the sparkling snow, the greetings along the street.

But the old pieces of furniture, set with a meager exactness in the chilly room, exerted the long-known influence of the everyday. After all, it was this that they must come back to. The day had been fine, but the day was over

and would not come again. Now, when they were alone, they had so little to say. Their room was too close, too familiar. Their knowledge of each other was too intimate for their speech to go outside its daily boundaries—they were afraid of that. They fell so quickly into the old ways with each other. She struggled against admitting this. "The cake was nice, wa'n't it?"

"Hm?"

"The cake. It was nice."

"Um. Yeah. Ain't you nearly ready?"

"It was nice of the children to plan it for us that way, a surprise like that."

. . . But it was no use. He would never talk about things. He was pulling her down to the old level again. She folded away the lace collar, put the brooch in the small jeweler's box with her watch chain and an old ring. She would have liked to go over the whole day, picking out and holding up the intimate and significant details—but he wanted the light out, wanted to get to sleep. She was softened toward him, thinking of that moment on the snowy street when he had lifted their two hands. She was not ready to let the day go. Why couldn't pa ever talk things over with her? He'd talk more to anybody than to her.

She felt the still, frosty wonder of the night, as she stood a moment at the small window. And because she could not share this—felt so helpless—a little old, thin bitterness seeped through her proud exaltation, tincturing it with the familiar quality of every day. . . .

He turned over restlessly. "Well, ma! Ain't ye ever comin' to bed?"

"Well, can't you give me time to put away my things?"

"Hmp . . . 'time'!" And other mutterings, half intelligible.

But when she put out the light and climbed into the creaking bed beside him, he was at ease. He soon went to sleep. She lay beside him, awake for a long time.

The irritation died away into calm, and she lay holding in the solitude of her own mind deeply felt, wordless things . . . as she had done in countless other nights; holding quiet both the beauty and the bitterness, encompassing them in the tranquillity of her comprehension . . . not so ill content, after all, that he should drop off childlike to sleep, and leave her and those incommunicable thoughts alone.

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